THE POETRY OF WINTER:

THE IDEA AND NATURE OF THE LATE CAREER IN THE WORKS OF HARDY, YEATS, AND STEVENS.

by

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Abstract

This thesis is divided into four chapters, the first of which is theoretical and synoptic. The method of chapter 1 is threefold. Firstly, an examination of the idea of the late career, including previous research on the subject, common perceptions and archetypes, and a consideration of the nature of artistic self-consciousness as it influences the late career. Secondly, a discussion of old age in literature, including the context of gerontology, our typically equivocal picture of old age as both decaying and spiritualized, and a consideration of the mode of creativity of the aged. Thirdly, an examination of literary "endings": the point at which the poet is faced with formal conclusions and "last things." A number of topics associated with or generated by the late career are considered, particularly the summational impulse, confrontation with death, and engagement with posterity: three perspectives supplied by the moment of ending.

In the three chapters which follow, I examine the structure of the late careers of Hardy, Yeats and Stevens, in particular the points of crisis and self-renewal, and including in each case works which precede the final phase. The evolving attitude of each poet to old age is examined, and a number of topics which seem intrinsic to the late career: monumental intentions and their decay, the fate of the poet's work in posterity, the dividing of the mortal body from the poetic corpus, the old man's introjected sexuality, and the heightened dualism of old age. Finally, in each case the "final gestures" of the poet are considered: his attempts to confront the demands of the literary "ending."

This work is dedicated to my parents, D.A. and J.G.A.

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Textual Note and Abbreviations Used

I have used the standard texts for scholarly citation from the works of Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens. In the case of Hardy, two recent editions are available. I have used the three-volume Complete Poetical Works edited by Samuel Hynes, in preference to James Gibson's Variorum Edition of The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, since the former is in some minor respects superior in its editorial procedures and apparatus.[1]

The following abbreviations are used for works cited frequently in the text.

PW The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy, ed. Samuel Hynes. 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982-85). Cited by volume: PW I, PW II, PW III.

EL The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891, by Florence Emily Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1928).

LY The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928, by Florence Emily Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1930).

VE The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

VP The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W.B. Yeats, ed. Russell K. Alspach (London: Macmillan, 1966).

A W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955).

AV W.B. Yeats, A Vision (1937; rpt. with corrections London: Macmillan, 1962).

E W.B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962).

1. See Robert C. Schweik's review of vols. I & II of the Hynes edition, VP, 22 (1984), 341-45. Because of the relative choices of copy-text, the two editions, which are textually very close, differ most in the earlier volumes of Hardy's work.

E&I W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961).

L The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954).

CP The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954).

OP Wallace Stevens, Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).

L Letters of Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

NA Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

Periodicals

I have used the following abbreviations for journals in the footnotes and bibliography. Other journals, including those social science journals which I cite, are given in full.

AL American Literature

BIS Browning Institute Studies

BRH Bulletin of Research in the Humanities

CentR Centennial Review

CL Contemporary Literature

CLAJ College Language Association Journal

CompL Comparative Literature

CQ Critical Quarterly

DAI Dissertations Abstracts International

DM The Dublin Magazine

E&S Essays & Studies

EIC	Essays in Criticism
ELH	English Literary History
GaR	Georgia Review
HudR	Hudson Review
IUR	Irish University Review
JAS	Journal of American Studies
KR	Kenyon Review
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLR	Modern Language Review
NCF	Nineteenth Century Fiction
N&Q	Notes and Queries
NLH	New Literary History
OLR	Oxford Literary Review
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
RES	Review of English Studies
SEL	Studies in English Literature
SIR	Studies in Romanticism
SoR	Southern Review
SR	Sewanee Review
SWR	Southwest Review
THSR	Thomas Hardy Society Review
TLS	Times Literary Supplement
TSLL	Texas Studies in Language and Literature
VP	Victorian Poetry
WWR	Walt Whitman Review
YFS	Yale French Studies
WSJ	Wallace Stevens Journal

Introduction

The beginnings of this study lie in my admiration for the late works of a number of poets who have continued to write to the end of long lives. Of these, Thomas Hardy is perhaps the most extraordinary, writing well into his eighties; but as writers live longer and as -- seemingly -- they regard writing as a continuing vocation, the number of aged writers constantly increases. Today writers like Robert Penn Warren in America and V.S. Pritchett, Graham Greene, and Doris Lessing in England continue to produce work of the highest standard, at the age of seventy or more. I wished to examine the sources of creativity in some of these writers, suggesting how they sustain themselves in later life, and investigating the characteristics of their late works.

One aspect of the study is, therefore, the literature of old age: its status and nature. Why is it that we do so often see the writer's old age as important? The answer lies at least partly, I think, in the fact that old age is a state of being which outlines in the starkest fashion the dualism fundamental to the Western philosophical tradition since Socrates (himself an old man often pictured on the point of death). In the creative old person the body decays towards death, but the spark of consciousness flickers on. The paradox of the incarnation of what has in different contexts been called "genius," "spirit," "essence," or "consciousness" in the corruptible flesh is most apparent in the writer in old age. Such a heightened dualism implies that our thinking about the aged devolves upon two related questions. The first question raised by the aged writer is <u>what is the relationship between</u>

writing and the body (or, the body and consciousness)? Using the analogy of the body inevitably leads to metaphors of decline, decay; or of relaxation and stasis. Secondly, what is the fate of the mind (consciousness, the work of consciousness) after death?[1] The perspective offered by language (or essence) supplies metaphors of survival, apotheosis, and the culmination of a life's work at the point of death where the writer joins the "immortals." There is, as I will show, a profound dualism in our thinking about the aged, informed by these two perspectives. The aged are on the one hand decaying, exhausted; but on the other hand, they are almost divine beings, freed from the demands of the body. In either case, the questions posed by the aged are the questions of all writing, defined at the limits of existence.

In examining old age, it is impossible not to examine the related idea of the "late" or "last" phase of a career. Last phases have always been granted a special status which draws upon deeply held cultural archetypes, and works across all the arts. The late plays of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Ibsen, the late novels of James and Mann, the late poetry of Hugo, Yeats, and Stevens, have all received an attention which assumes their singularity. In other fields the tendency is perhaps even more marked: the late paintings of Titian, Rembrandt, and Goya are used to substantiate assertions about the final works of writers, as are the late works of composers like Beethoven and Mahler. What is almost a parody of such criticism (but also an example of it within a work which is itself a major piece of theorizing on endings) is provided by Thomas

1. On the connection between dualism and ideas of immortality, see Hywel D. Lewis, Persons and Life After Death (London: Macmillan, 1978), ch. 6, "Immortality and Dualism."

Mann's idealist lecturer Kretschmar in Doctor Faustus (1947), discoursing on Beethoven:

> Where greatness and death come together, he declared, there arises an objectivity tending to the conventional, which in its majesty leaves the most domineering subjectivity far behind, because therein the merely personal -- which had after all been the surmounting of a tradition already brough to its peak -- once more outgrew itself, in that it entered into the mythical, the collectively great and supernatural.[1]

This is deliberately overblown, but not too far from a number of serious works on "late phases." The artist at the end of his life is commonly said to achieve a freedom from convention, a universality, and an almost transcendent concern for ultimate questions. He is the tradition incarnate; but also, often, outside of time.

Discussion of "literary careers" presupposes that we understand what careers are. At its most basic, a career is a path through life. It does not so much refer to the how of achievement as to the what or when. The entry in Who's Who is skeletal, it leaves out the day-to-day struggle. A study of careers will, in a parallel fashion, study the structure of achievement as much as the content of what is achieved; it will consider gaps and changes of mode, and the relationship of past achievement to future progress. But the word "career" has had two fairly distinct historical meanings. The earlier derives from French carrière, racecourse, and referred to either the course itself or to wild, unrestrained motion: careering about. The most common modern sense of the word, with its implication of continuity, dates from around 1800. The dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, or the tension between an achieved whole and the necessity for movement, is not only a matter of

1. Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), p. 53.

etymology. It is, as we will see, apparent in the late periods of many writers, and the shift in the meaning of the word approximately corresponds to a shift in the historical emphasis placed on a well-shaped career.

In the case of each of these topics, old age and late works, I examine the possibilities offered by society, by literary tradition, and by the writer's preconceptions, attempting to portray old age as a dynamic process in which the individual faces a number of problems imposed from within and from without. I will also examine, in the case of each poet, a number of "topics" which seem to be a result of these pressures. In so doing, I will draw on what is the third strand of this thesis: the rather indefinable idea of literary "endings" and the limit of writing itself. The late career gains much of its singularity from the formal and other problems created by the prospect of the end of writing, death, and the survival of the works. "Endings," like "Beginnings," involve fundamental questions about the nature of writing, as I have already suggested in discussing old age. The first chapter will explore some of the theoretical questions so generated; while the subsequent chapters will apply these ideas to Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens.

The choice of writers used in this study must be mentioned. Previous studies on the literature of old age have used Goethe, Henry James, Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, Pound, and W.C. Williams.[1] More general studies of late periods have used Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tolstoy, Milton, and other writers; as well as loose parallels with those artists and musicians who seem to enter a special state of creativity late in

1. The most relevant of these studies are discussed in section 1.1.1.

life.[1] A number of factors have governed the selection here. Firstly, the criterion of age. The "late phase" is in itself only loosely linked to old age: we speak of Keats's late phase. But in the extreme and spiritualized form it is linked to old age, and I have chosen to retain that connection, excluding those who produce an early "late phase." Even Eliot could be placed in this category, and in fact it is the idealization of Eliot's essentially middle-aged religious perceptions which seriously skews one study in late creativity.[2] Secondly, those who write little, or in general poorly, in old age have been ruled out: Wordsworth, for example, and (less easily) Whitman. The most important positive criterion is that of variety: the way in which each of the three poets Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens have formed their late careers. Hardy, who has the additional advantage of being little studied in this respect, was a novelist turned poet, with two almost separate careers. He also wrote into extreme old age. Yeats is a poet with a career stretching continuously from his adolescence (Pound would have supplied a similar, though more complex, example). Stevens is interesting for the lateness of his career, and because what is usually seen as his major phase was so close to the end of his life, and it was only then that he publicly took on the role of writer. The three poets thus form a composite portrait of three different late phases in the period since 1900.

1. There are numerous works on Shakespeare's last phase, many of which use the idea of the "late" work; and his late career has been compared with those of a number of other writers. As Frank Kermode remarks in his Shakespeare: The Final Plays (London: Longmans, Green, 1963), p. 8, these plays have traditionally been allegorized and seen as containing a "message."
2. See pp. 22-23 below.

A related question is that of genre and the relationship between the focus of this study -- three poets -- and other writers. To what extent can the conclusions that I draw be related to other genres? Perhaps the most important factor here is the self-conscious and self-expressive nature of poetry. In other genres the writer's sense of artistic destiny is necessarily mediated by the realistic and representational demands of the novel or drama. But even supposedly realistic novelists tend to see their work as a subjective expression of their selves as they age (as do their readers), and with dramatists this is even more the case. Shakespeare's career is one of the canonical ones, and the lives of Ibsen and later dramatists are often seen as pilgrimages in writing. In the case of other discourses this is just as true: we can trace the patterns of the late careers of writers like Nietzsche and Freud and see that they share a good deal in common with the poets studied here. On the other hand, a number of material factors intervene. There are fewer novelists who write well into old age (with James, Powys and a few others as exceptions), partly because of the physical demands of novel-writing. Indeed, just as there was in the Renaissance a conventional progress from secular to religious verse, there is a movement from prose to poetry in a number of modern writers. Hugo, Meredith, Hardy, and Robert Penn Warren all abandoned novels while continuing with their poetry. Poetry is in some senses a more "fundamental" activity, a mode of creativity appropriate to age in its elevation and distance from the world -- or so the conventional claim has it. There is thus some justification for focussing a study of aged creativity on the work of poets, apart from the general need to draw boundaries in order to delimit a topic.

This is also a study in the attitudes and self-understanding of writers, as well as what they do write. In explaining their continued creativity it is often useful to examine their expressed attitudes to their lives and works, to ask how they deal with crises. Many of the questions which poets ask in old age are cognitive: how do I think my work will survive; does it cohere? It is thus difficult to separate any one discourse from another. Indeed, I will argue that for each of the poets I discuss in detail there is a late prose work which is important in enabling them to achieve an authority which will let them enter a "late phase" -- self-justification is an imperative, just as it is at certain moments in earlier life. Crises require poets to become critics.

Finally, a word about sexual differences as they affect the problems studied here. In general, women writers have had careers which are not pursued within the framework offered by the classical patterns. This is especially true of female poets. Their careers are, as a number of writers suggest, conditioned by all the forces of cultural containment which we are beginning only now to understand, and are often consciously in opposition to dominant male models.[1] I thus make no apologies for not including any women writers in my study, and where I generalize about poets I will occasionally use the general pronoun "he" rather than "he or she," acknowledging the limitations so defined. The same consideration applies to the usage of the writers studied: where Thomas Hardy speculates on "poets" he invariably means male poets, for all his commitment to the emancipation of women and friendships with female poets.

1. See, for example, the preface to Cheryl Walker's The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

Chapter 1 : Final Phases and Last Phrases

Like the subsequent chapters, this opening chapter will be divided into three parts. In the first section I will examine the idea of the "late phase," reviewing some of the writings on the subject and establishing a framework for the discussion of late careers, before making some suggestions about the characteristic problems, motives, and patterns in the careers of poets. The second section will consider the role of old age in late careers, assessing the relevance of social-science research on aging, the influence of both common beliefs about aging and the classical <u>exempla</u> in the literary tradition, and discussing the mode of creativity apparent in old age. The third section will concern itself with formal aspects of the problem of the literary "ending," including also the problems raised by the limit itself: the depiction of death, the question of closure, and the relationship of the writer to posterity. Necessarily, these three sections will at points overlap in their subject matter (for example, I will in examining other research in the first section broaden its scope and discuss the overall depiction of final periods in these works). In the chapters which follow this one I will also use a tripartite division, with a slightly different emphasis: the first section will deal with the structure of the late career and the way in which the poet sees his old age; the second section will deal with topics which seem important in the poet's late career, and the final section with aspects of the literary "ending."

1.1 The Late Career

The idea of a late career is dependent on any author's first having achieved a productive maturity. A typical view of the mature phase is that it involves an authority in which the author's name is enough to guarantee not only the worth but also the meaning and coherence of the work within an oeuvre. E.W. Said suggests that there is a point at which a literary career constitutes a discourse, with its own codes and expectations, rather than the rhetorical speech of an individual subject.[1] Other critics speak of a "landscape" of vision, or of a life within which, as Morton Zabel puts it, "every chance or mischance . . . takes on the justice of destiny."[2] But such a sense of totality offers few clues about the late career, other than those supplied by the monumental metaphor: the late career becomes like a chip off the old block -- a supplement to what is already formed. This is undoubtedly true in some cases, but there is often a good deal more to late careers. What are the possibilities? What does the late career have to offer which is unique to itself? We can begin to answer these questions by examining the literature on the subject.

1. E.W. Said, Beginnings: Intention and Method (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 257. Said refers in particular to Marx, Freud, and other systematic thinkers.
2. Morton D. Zabel, "Yeats: The Book and the Image," in The Permanence of Yeats: Selected Criticism, ed. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 352.

1.1.1 Some Possibilities

Discussions of time and writing often serve as a vehicle for the consideration of other topics. Frank Kermode's influential The Sense of An Ending (1967) concentrates mainly on the theory of fictions and the need for myths of closure, as well as the anti-closural element in modern literature. Edward Said's Beginnings (1975) argues for a demythologized view of history and an emphasis on writing as a constantly revisionary struggle for new meaning; and Charles Altieri's proposal of a balancing theory of "middles" in literature anticipates his arguments for a humanism founded on the values of the classical novel.[1] Even Lawrence Lipking's The Life of the Poet (1981) contains a good deal of material which has little to do with its supposed topic, for all its brilliance. Nevertheless there has been a certain amount of useful work, in different contexts, into the nature and structure of literary careers, and endings in particular.

A number of the works which deal with late careers simply do so in the interests of delimiting a subject, and are thus of little direct relevance here (though their individual conclusions may be relevant to particular authors). In this category one can place works like Thomas Hines's The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens (1976). In addition, there is a further class of books which deal with a group of late works without any strong attempt to describe their common traits or to explain the

1. Charles Altieri, "The Qualities of Action: A Theory of Middles in Literature," Boundary 2, 5 (1977), 323-51. The arguments in this article anticipate some of those in his Act and Quality: A Theory of Literary Meaning and Humanistic Understanding (Brighton: Harvester, 1981).

problems of old age. This would include such useful studies as David Grene's Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles (1967), and Kenneth Muir's Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine, and Ibsen (1961) -- though the former makes a number of suggestions about the confrontation of death and sexuality, and a "commonly conceived tragic world"; while the latter suggests that these works contain a turning from the tragic to the fantastic, and a "partial repudiation" of their authors' earlier work.[1] These works are, of course, outside the immediate concern of this study, which focusses its attention primarily on poets.

The broadest perspective within which the literary career can be examined is that of all human lives, and a number of writers have attempted to describe the "passages" through which any life passes.[2] I will briefly review the evidence of gerontology later in this chapter, but it can be remarked here that most such studies operate at a level of generality which is of little use in describing the aged artist and his or her specific problems. The work of Erikson, Levinson and others also tends to be over-normative; though some gerontologists, like B.L. Neugarten, point out the diversity of possible responses to aging: Neugarten divides the aged into the "reorganizers," the "focussed," the "disengaged," and a number of other less happy categories.[3] A more

1. David Grene, Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 9 et passim; Kenneth Muir, Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine, and Ibsen (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1961), pp. 113-16.
2. See particularly Daniel J. Levinson et al., The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).
3. B.L. Neugarten et al, "Personality Patterns of Aging," in Middle Age and Aging, ed. B.L. Neugarten (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 173-77.

art-specific typology is provided by George Kubler in his The Shape of Time (1962). Kubler distinguishes artistic types which include the slow-paced artist whose life contains one major problem or obsession, the versatile artist who quickly exploits new situations (including old age), the withdrawn obsessive, the innovator, the evangelist, the precursor who expects eventual vindication, the rebel, and so on.[1] What an artist produces in old age will obviously be partly determined by his or her type. Kubler's analysis of the artistic life-cycle is less subtle, however: he divides it into four periods of about fifteen years (an "interdiction"), and is unhopeful about the creativity of the aged, seeing at best a realization of what was conceived earlier, rather than any creativity specific to the late phase.[2]

Within the same essentially structuralist mode of analysis, an influential recent work in the study of poetic careers and their determinants is Lawrence Lipking's The Life of the Poet: a work which should, nevertheless, be placed in the context of a revival of biographical criticism which attempts to examine the life of the poet in writing, the constructed life.[3] Lipking uses a three-stage analysis of

1. George Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 86-92. Kubler is largely concerned with the visual arts: the book is partly a counter-argument to the "Geistgeschichte" analysis of Wölfflin and others.
2. Ibid., pp. 102-05. An interdiction is, he says, "a measure drawn from experience, like paces, feet, and ells. . . . ."
3. The archetypal such work could, perhaps, be seen in William Carlos William's I Wanted to Write a Poem (1958; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), seeking to present "the history of the writing itself" (p. 7) -- though with mixed success. I have in mind, however, a number of more recent studies, including Said's Beginnings, which focus on artistic self-consciousness; and single-author studies like William Howarth's The Book of Concord: Thoreau's Life as a Writer (New York: Viking, 1982), and Julie Ellison's Emerson's Romantic Style (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

literary lives, but in practice he is most concerned with beginnings and with works of self-renewal (like Yeat's Per Amica Silentia Lunae), and with the overall idea of a career in writers like Whitman and Broch. He has less to say about late periods, simply analysing endings as they appear in a few key poems -- Keats's "This Living Hand," Lowell's "Reading Myself," Rilke's final poems -- and pointing out some of the demands which they make on the reader.[1] A similar analysis of career-structures is that of Harold Bloom. Bloom has moved from a two-stage analysis of the careers of romantic poets to the six stages of his "Map of Misprison," and most recently to the position that there are three "crossings" in the life of a poet, pertaining to incarnation, solipsism, and death. Within the six-stage structure Bloom saw the final stage ("apophrades") as characterized by a complex relationship with tradition which involves the poet's projection of himself into an "earliness" in which he seems to found the tradition which he springs from. Allusion is the characteristic trope of this phase.[2] The problem with this is not only that Bloom's position keeps changing, it is also that he uses the "map" both synchronically (to interpret a poem at any stage in a career) and diachronically, expanding his critical framework to the point of its being useless.

In contrast to such studies of self-consciousness and career-structure, there have been a number of works which attempt to speculate about the psychological and spiritual roots of aged

1. Lawrence Lipking, The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 180-91.
2. See Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), and his subsequent books. He returns to a three-stage map in the introduction and coda of his Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

creativity. Dale Manning, in a dissertation on the late works of James, Yeats, and Eliot, argues that each of these writers undergoes an emotional and spiritual crisis "amounting to a mental breakdown" in later life, followed by a "resurgence of creative activity, markedly different from that which preceded the crisis, characterized by a movement away from a predominantly personal point of view toward a more universal one."[1] The main characteristics of the late works produced after this experience include "a preoccupation with the supernatural," "a seeming detachment in such elements as style, personae, point of view -- a detachment that may be interpreted as an effacement of the artist's personality or as an integration of the person and his work," and the development an "androgynous mind."[2] The author undergoes a tragic experience which finds its archetype in Oedipus at Colonus: the personality is decomposed in the sparagmos and the result is the "transfigured imagination" in which the author is returned to a reality which now seems universalized.[3] Manning provides a highly theoretical account of this archetypal experience, drawing form Jung, Norman O. Brown, Frye, June K. Springer (on androgyny), Eliade, and a number of developmental psychologists, in particular Erikson and Levinson.

I do not have space to discuss all these claims, but in general the thesis suffers from the shortcomings of all "myth" criticism: it sets up a number of categories which are supposed to describe literature but which are in fact drawn from it. In this case, considerable violence is done to the lives of his authors: both James and Yeats were, for example,

1. Dale Manning, "Beyond Colonos: Tragic Vision and the Transfigured Imagination in the Late Works of Henry James, William Butler Yeats, and T.S. Eliot," Diss. Vanderbilt University 1982, p. 4.
2. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
3. Ibid., pp. 44-59, 225-26.

interested in supernaturalism even more in their earlier careers than their late careers, and the works of all these authors can only be described as "androgynous" in limited ways. Manning's account has little success in determining exactly what the late crises of the three authors are, and he is forced to pin his case on a few works like "The Circus Animals' Desertion," unconscious of the possible ironies implicit in the author's using the same myth that he uses (Oedipus). Little hard analysis of style is provided, or account for any of the changes he supposedly sees, and it is perhaps a measure of the idealism of his approach that he claims to be talking of the history not of the writer or works but of the imagination.[1] His work is also largely ahistorical, ignoring the changing cultural context of a writer's career; and it lacks any sense of that which is fundamental to the activity of writing, the sense of the writer struggling to solve the problems presented by his materials and the demands of a career; the need to write a life.

Perhaps the most developed study of late careers and their characteristics is that of Kathleen Woodward. In her At Last, The Real Distinguished Thing: The Late Poems of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams (1980) she has commented on the qualities of the late works of "American Modernism," suggesting that these works contain valuable lessons for our age.[2] The features which she identifies include the central image of a "stillpoint" in the late works she examines; a new meditative mode in which receptivity is more highly valued than the muscular act of the mind which she sees as characteristic of younger poets; a new hero in the "wise old man"; and a dedication to tradition

1. Ibid., p. 61.
2. Kathleen Woodward, At Last, The Real Distinguished Thing: The Late Poems of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams (Williamsburg: Ohio State University Press, 1980), p. xi.

and the creative act as a stay against chaos; as well as a tendency to what is sometimes called the "life review."[1] Woodward makes a case for some of these categories, but her work is marred by a tendency to over-generalize from a small sample. She excludes the late works of Pound, claims that Eliot's relative youth when he wrote The Four Quartets presents no problems, and avoids discussion of authors (and poems) which do not conform to her theories. Her thrust is, moreover, normative and parochial: she claims that poetic survival is a characteristic of a select band of American masters, comparing them to the English Romantics (Yeats is barely mentioned, Landor and Hardy not at all).[2] While asserting that the voice of the aged must be listened to, she is willing to say that Williams "fails" to integrate his final stage and come up to the standard of the others.[3] Another problem is that she does not attempt to balance the ideas which she sees as typical of old age with their use elsewhere: the "still point," for example, and the abandonment of the "Promethean" consciousness, both of which can be seen at earlier points in the lives of many writers.

A final work which I will mention in this brief survey is Leon Edel's essay "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man." The essay is not particularly original in itself, but serves as a useful benchmark of fairly common attitudes, and makes a number of interesting propositions. Edel paints a glowing portrait of Goethe's old age in terms of Goethe's

1. Ibid., pp. 6-25. Cf. Betty Buchsbaum, "Wallace Stevens: The Wisdom of the Body in Old Age," SoR, 15 (1979), 953-68, which makes similar claims.
2. Whitman shows a similar, though qualified, nationalism in his late essay on "Old Poets," Prose Works, 1882, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964), II, 658-62.
3. Woodward, pp. 161-63.

own metaphor of the oak which outgrows all other trees. He sees old age as characterized by acceptance (including an acceptance that things are never perfect), by memory rather than "the need to advance and to achieve," and "a freedom curtailed by physical change -- a waning resilience in the mind, a tendency for fantasy to become circular and repetitive. . . ."[1] In old age "the atmosphere may be more rarefied, but it is more panoramic" (another metaphor derived from Goethe's oak). He sees the successful aged (James, Yeats) as channelling their sexual drives into their art and achieving a transcendental freedom, whereas the unsuccessful aged (Tolstoy) is embittered, authoritarian, and unaccepting of his self.

All the works which I have cited suffer from some of the idealizations of traditional views of late careers -- views which are themselves one of the challenges of late careers. There is, as I will suggest, a certain instability about our view of aged writers. They may take the quantum leap suggested by the title of a recent article, "Greatness and Robert Penn Warren," or they may decline into the premature death suggested by another recent review of Lawrence Durrell: "[he] is reliving his oeuvre, resurrecting, metamorphosing and mummifying his central themes."[2] In my analysis of late careers in the chapters which follow this one, I will attempt to look at them from the inside, seeking to describe the evolving self-perception of the poet, and identifying the points of crisis, change, and solution. I will also examine the encounter of each poet with old age and the idea of a late

1. Leon Edel, Stuff of Sleep and Dreams: Experiments in Literary Psychology (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), pp. 138-42.
2. Calvin Bedient, "Greatness and Robert Penn Warren," SR, 89 (1981), 332-48. Bedient suggests that "in a race with death his creativity has gone into drive" (p. 332). Lorna Sage, "A Private Wax-museum," rev. of Lawrence Durrell's Constance or Solitary Practices, Observer, 10 October 1982, p. 31.

period, detailing the adjustments in ideals and self-perception involved.

1.1.2 The Idea of the Late Career

As Lawrence Lipking has argued, the most potent model for the poet's career has been the cursus honorum of Virgil.[1] Virgil provides a model of pastoral beginnings and later full achievement which is more or less followed by a number of poets down to Pope, in whom we see the tradition at its most self-conscious. But as Lipking suggests, after the eighteenth century other possibilities became more dominant. Goethe repudiated the Virgilian model, and later poets produced even more radical rejections of previous notions of career, including a recognisable pattern of anti-careers. In fact, other models than the classical were always available to writers, including those of the biblical prophets. One could even point out what could be called the dark side of the Virgilian model: his death, and the Medieval legends surrounding his grave which, as J.B. Trapp argues, draw more on the magician than the writer of the epic.[2] Even if the later humanistic tradition was to eschew those legends, the story of his wish that the Aeneid be destroyed remained a potent image of an apocalyptic ending -- a gesture of self-effacement, or incompleteness -- as Hermann Broch's The Death of Virgil (1945) makes clear.[3] And as Trapp shows, the actual monuments and attempts to celebrate Virgil form a remarkable story of

1. Lipking, pp. xi-xiii.
2. J.B. Trapp, The Poet and the Monumental Impulse, Occasional Papers No. 6 (London: The Society for Renaissance Studies, 1980), pp. 3-4.
3. See Lipking, pp. 130-37.

confusion, misunderstanding, and mixed motives, a salutary lesson for any poet that the fate of one's bones and reputation is uncertain.

The classical tradition is thus somewhat uncertain about late careers and last works. There were some long-lived writers in antiquity (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides) but their careers were not strongly canonical; and as Simone de Beauvoir has shown, there has never been a great deal of literature on the subject of old age in the Western tradition (with the notable exceptions of Oedipus at Colonos and King Lear).[1] Writers, like others, did not live long, and though there are a few writers who wrote in relative old age in the Renaissance, it is only relatively recently that there could be said to be a tradition of aged writers -- something suggested by Hardy's difficulty in finding models for his own longevity. Milton can be seen, as Frank Kermode has suggested, as an aged poet adjusting to a winter climate after the Restoration, and he does supply a certain kind of model: the Tiresias-like figure or prophet in the wilderness.[2] But he seems to serve more powerfully as a figure of mature creativity for those who followed him, such was his power. The same could perhaps be said of the Goethe who wrote Faust, Part II, though in Goethe's case his geriatric amours created a more equivocal picture of an old man both wise and foolish. For later writers, the accident of the early deaths of Keats

1. Simone de Beauvoir, Old Age, trans. Patrick O'Brian (London: André Deutsch and Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972), p. 165.
2. See Frank Kermode, "Milton in Old Age," SoR, 11 (1975), 513-29. Kermode suggests that in Paradise Regained, and particularly in "Samson Agonistes," Milton recast his conception of the heroic to account for a passive hero, and his own life according to the dispensation of 2 Cor. 12: 9-10, "my strength is made perfect in weakness." Edmund Waller's famous "last" poem seems to allude to the same biblical passage: "Stronger by weakness, wiser men become, / As they draw near to their eternal home."

and Shelley transfigured them, as George Bornstein remarks, into "perpetual icons of poetic youth and integrity," and the late careers of many writers are often marked by a struggle with what Bornstein calls "an early ideal of the poetic character."[1] The old ages of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning were deeply problematic for their successors.

Given this uncertain tradition, writers in old age have often faced problems. Moreover, in examining late careers it is necessary to consider the life of a writer as something shaped both by outer demands, conventions, and an inner struggle to sustain creativity. These two sets of factors ofter intersect. Success, in particular, is a major problem for many writers in the romantic tradition. When Carlyle writes on "The Hero as Man of Letters" he both asserts that the literary life should be an "ordeal" and a sacrifice, and at the same time suggests the setting up of literary guilds to guarantee recognition.[2] In later life such divided attitudes produce conflicts between achievement and continued production, and suggest the late careers of, say, Landor and Wordsworth as the main alternatives, both writers suffering from their extremes of respectability or exclusion. Moreover, the writer's accumulated works coexist with him as a ghostly double which may be a burden in more ways than one. All three of the authors discussed here had a section of their audience who preferred their earlier works (and in Hardy's case, a different genre). The "tradition of oneself" is not only a problem in terms of the audience. If the writer must keep producing, the works

1. George Bornstein, "Last Romantic or Last Victorian: Yeats, Tennyson, and Browning," in the Yeats Annual, No. I, ed. Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 130.
2. On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History, Vol. V of The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary Edition, ed. H.D. Traill (London: Chapman & Hall, 1896-99), pp. 165-67.

already accumulated may be a hindrance rather than a help in that process of composition which is suggested by Schlegel's dictum that "The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence. . . ."[1]

Often, faced with their own fame, poets seem to progress by a movement which turns against their earlier work, in the spirit suggested by Nietzsche's "increscunt animi, virescit volnere virtus."[2] The old poet may place or see himself in extremis and insist on a discontinuity which will prevent the acceptance and chronicling of diminished aims that was seen to characterize the late careers of Wordsworth and others. Metaphors of catastrophe, purgation, and transfiguration are appropriate to such a transition, as are those of destruction and decomposition, like Yeats's "wither into the truth." A writer may produce palinodes, or parody work written earlier, suggesting that it was a delusion from which he or she has emerged into reality. Or -- a possibility which Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens all explore -- apocalyptic modes of thought may be used to emphasize the poet's antagonistic relationship with the outside world. Creation in the Romantic tradition tends, as Harold Bloom suggests, to be through continued catastrophe.

Another seemingly important way in which such a revitalization and structural shift in a career may be effected is through a work of theory. Just as poets who introduce new ideas often seek to "justify" their method in a work of poetical theory (or mixed poetry and theory),

1. Athenaeum Fragments, 116, in Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 175.
2. "The Spirit grows, strength is restored by wounding." The motto and (mis) translation can be found in the Foreword to Twilight of the Idols, in Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 21.

in all the poets which I study here there is a work which seems to "release" them into a late phase. Yeats's A Vision, Hardy's autobiography, and Stevens' late essays are all works of self-justification in which the poets explain their procedure, almost as if they were writing critical treatises on themselves. And each of these works deals to some extent, as I will show, with topics like the poet's posterity, the overall shape of their career, and the mode of creativity of old age. They thus stand on the borderline between mature achievement and the concerns of the late period.

Finally, we can return to a historical perspective in order to suggest that the "strong" late periods which are discussed in this thesis have, for all their origins in Romanticism, become something of a classical pattern. As such, they must be set against changes in the apparent possibilities of literature. The idea of a well-shaped life, drawing as it does on humanistic ideas of genius and self-realization, has become increasingly difficult in the last century. Thomas Mann saw himself as standing at the end of a tradition:

> Even in these times it is possible for a man to construct out of his life and work a culture, a small cosmos, in which everything is interrelated, which, despite all diversity, forms a complete personal whole, and which stands more or less on an equal footing with the great life-syntheses of earlier ages.[1]

In poetry the fragmentation of achievement had set in earlier than Mann's comment on the tradition of the novel suggests, and even in the writers in this study their late achievements coexist with an awareness of darker possibilities. The strength of their late work is a measure of the difficulty of the task of imagining a "life synthesis." Many later writers have rejected the whole idea of the artist having a destiny and

1. Letter to Hermann Weigand, 29 April 1952. The Letters of Thomas Mann, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), II, 642. Mann thought, however, that his career should have ended with Doctor Faustus. Ibid., II, 658, 667.

"periods." Roy Fuller has a poem in which he mocks himself in such terms: "Ugly and impotent I live / The myth of a final period."[1] The aesthetics of post-Modernism are such that the careers of other poets seem like protracted endings, or an interrogation of the possibility of ending.[2] Beckett's career could be seen in such terms, though it does in fact have a certain rigour, and the later prose pieces like The Lost Ones (1972), Company (1980), and Ill Seen, Ill Said (1982) seem to explore different purgatories in the manner of some of Yeats's late works. Robert Lowell is a good example of the poet wedded to the tradition of achievement, but who at the end of his life seemed forced into a diaristic mode of writing by the pressures of life, only intermittently in control of its shaping. As Donald Davie has commented, the diary seems the ideal metaphor for the voluminous production of American poets like A.R. Ammons and John Ashbery -- meaning, perhaps, that they never cease to write the life of the mind, but also that they do not see their life as a mythic pattern in the manner of a Yeats of Pound.[3] Such changes in the self-perception of poets will inevitably affect late careers. But it is worth pointing out that there is a conservative tendency inherent in old age. Looking back over their lives, poets often see that there was a pattern, that a world has been created. Even poets who, like Auden and Graves, reject a chronological treatment of their work often have late second thoughts. As Auden wrote, "It's very important to be one's age."[4] Whether such considerations will influence the careers of the present generation of poets remains to be seen.

1. Roy Fuller, Collected Poems, 1936-1961 (London: André Deutsch, 1962), p. 196.
2. See, for example, Cary Nelson, "The Resources of Failure: W.S. Merwin's Deconstructive Career," Boundary 2, 5 (1977), 573-98.
3. Donald Davie, "Voices Modern and Postmodern," SR, 89 (1981), 114.
4. Quoted by Charles Osborne, W.H. Auden: The Life of a Poet (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 331.

1.2 Literature and Old Age

"Even old age," said Yeats, "is an imaginative art." In some of the research which I reviewed in the last section, an attempt was made to define the characteristic imaginative modes of old age. Such analysis has mixed results, and like research on the aged in general, it often imposes the idealizations and fears of younger writers on the aged: stereotypes which are themselves part of the problem for the old. In the section which follows I will focus to some extent on the psychology of old age, but quickly move on to the question which Yeats's comment raises: what can writers make of old age? How do they regard its limitations, its archetypes and traditions, and society's expectations of them? How does their attitude change as they age? It is, of course, difficult to generalize: the old are no more monolithic than the young; but it should be possible to identify the wider literary conventions, genres, and codes which form the horizon within which such an "imaginative art" is practised.

1.2.1 The Context of Gerontology

The psychology of old age is a difficult subject. Like other areas of developmental psychology, it is perhaps only beginning to assess its own claims to a "scientific" status and to recast its expectations accordingly. Much of the voluminous gerontological research which has been published is of little use to the student of old age in literature. Partly this is a result of the nature of the social sciences, which apply

broadly defined measures to large groups of people in order to seek a result which is at best a trend or probability. Gifted or atypical people are not discussed, except in a few specialized studies, and even there the result is often that the categories which are employed are themselves tested, just as phenomenologists have questioned all studies which do not work _from_ individual perceptions rather than imposing categories in an _a priori_ fashion. The subject's ability to create his or her own meanings is apparent at its most extreme in the poet. Another problem lies in the dividedness of the social sciences themselves. In gerontology, the most influential theory of the last three decades, "Disengagement Theory," has been questioned strongly and shown to be dependent upon dozens of intervening variables in its correlations: sex, health, educational and social status, presence of family, retirement, mobility, and wealth.[1]

Nevertheless, it is probably worth making a few remarks about the findings of social science research as they relate to aged creativity. Firstly, they tend to reinforce the idea that creativity in old age is expressed through a decline in productivity (if not in the quality of production). The bare statistical analyses suggest that poets do somewhat better than other types of creative artists (though less well than academics).[2] But these are crude work-counts, and ignore

1. See, for example, A.R. Hochschild, "Disengagement Theory: A Logical, Empirical, and Phenomenological Critique," in _Time, Roles, and Self in Old Age_, ed. Jaber E. Gubrium (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1976), pp. 53-88; and Sherry L. Willis and Paul B. Baltes, "Intelligence in Adulthood and Aging: Contemporary Issues," in _Aging in the 1980s_, ed. Leonard W. Poon (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1980), p. 260.
2. See Wayne Dennis, "Creative Productivity Between the Ages of Twenty and Eighty Years," _Journal of Gerontology_, 21 (1966), 1-8; Patricia K. Alpaugh and James E. Birren, "Variables Affecting Creative Contributions Across the Adult Life Span," _Human Development_, 18 (1975), 461-65.

important features such as historical changes in attitudes to aged creativity, and the mechanics of production (poetry is easier to write than novels in terms of physical effort, something which undoubtedly influences the change in genre common in late life). Support for the idea of declined creativity is suggested by those studies which see the old as less flexible and able to respond to new situations.[1] But again the question is a more complex one that most social scientists have allowed: the old have their own creativity; the relationship of creativity to tradition is not a simple opposition.

For the purposes of this study broadly-based statistical descriptions are rather unhelpful. More useful are those studies which suggest what <u>type</u> of creativity the old might have. The problem with these are that they are usually too general to be of much value. It comes as no great surprise to be told that "introversion" increases in later life, or that old people tend to live in memory and review their past. At a more advanced level, the psychological studies become rather too technical to be of interest: the study of memory, for example, fragments memory into a number of components which are determined by the paradigm itself.[2] And once again, even within gerontology researchers often stress the importance of individual life-histories and the ability of gifted individuals to provide exceptions to their findings rather than reinforcing them.

1. In general, research indicates that past the age of seventy there is a decline in ability to respond to "unstructured" situations, or to perceive new analogies. On the other hand, the old may respond faster to structured situations (ones with which they are familiar). Such examples suggest the complexity of any attempt to measure changes in cognitive processes with old age.
2. See James L. Fozard, "The Time for Remembering," in <u>Aging in the 1980s</u>, pp. 273-287.

It is a failure to appreciate some of the problems outlined above which qualifies the claims which writers like Manning and Buchsbaum make in applying the work of gerontologists and developmental psychologists (particularly Erikson) to poets. The idea of the "passivity" of old age which both employ, for example, may have its opposite in the reaction of old poets against the physical impositions of old age. An even better example is the idea of "androgyny" which these writers and others have linked to late works. There is, indeed, some research suggesting that the sexes tend to "converge" in terms of traditional (and therefore often sexist) measures of sexual characteristics in old age. There may even be elements of an exchange of those traditional roles within couples.[1] John Cowper Powys in his (elderly) polemic The Art of Growing Old (1944) idealizes such an exchange, writing of a "deliberately cultivated porousness" to the "primordial presences" of both sexes.[2] Such a cultivation is present in the late works of Yeats, among others: a distance from sex which allows it to be treated as a creative principle independently of its details. But it is also apparent in the work of younger writers: Hardy for example, who portrays women sensitively in his novels, and D.H. Lawrence, even though he supports a mythology aimed at glorifying certain male attributes. It is, again, difficult to

1. Matilda W. Riley, Anne Foner and associates, Aging and Society, Vol. I, An Inventory of Research Findings, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), pp. 229 ff. It should be emphasized, however, that much of this effect is related to the role of men and women in the family unit: after retirement men lose status and women, more active around the home, become more dominant. The effect thus vanishes in the social strata where men work on and receive prestige outside the home, which is the case for successful writers. Again, this demonstrates the difficulty of applying the findings of social science research to a small atypical group of individuals of high motivation.
2. John Cowper Powys, The Art of Growing Old (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp. 83-86.

generalize about writers whose judgements are often less related to biology than is the case for most people, and who themselves may question the currently accepted ideas of what "male" or "female" are. In addition, the revulsion which the (relatively) young often display at the thought of aged sexuality means that it can be used as a weapon, as Yeats uses it in "The Spur." Roland Blythe comments of Coleridge's old men that they are "Gribouillists, the term given in modern geriatric psychiatry to those who embrace the hideousness of old age and who use it to plague the rest of society."[1] Such Gribouillism is a common topos in the literature of aged writers, a way of dramatizing both their feelings of disillusion, but also their continuing and shocking fecundity. The same could be said of the characteristic of the aged which Michael Balint calls "the importance of the enjoyment of the body's vegetative functions."[2] The old writer tends to use these functions; they take on a metaphorical weight, as sleep does in Stevens' work. A third example of a common perception of old age which can be subverted by the old writer is that of old age as a "second childhood." Hobbes was moved to protest that "That saying, meant onely of the weaknesse of body, was wrested to the weaknesses of minde, by froward children, weary of the controulment of their parents, masters, and other admonitors."[3] But writers in old age can find, as Stevens does, and as Hugo surely did in writing of his grand-children in L'Art d'être grand-père (1877), a

1. Roland Blythe, The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 33.
2. Michael Balint, "The Psychological Problems of Growing Old" (1933), in his Problems of Human Pleasure and Behaviour (New York: Liveright, 1957), p. 76.
3. "The answer of Mr. Hobbes to Sir Will. D'Avenant's Preface Before Gondibert," quoted from Sir William Davenant's Gondibert, ed. David F. Gladish (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 54.

different meaning for the same metaphor: a new freedom, or a sense of potential rebirth. The idea of decay itself is, as I will suggest, amenable to such transformation. As Simone de Beauvoir sagely remarks, "the ideologies that look upon old age as a social category are in direct opposition to the attitude of the poets when they are faced with what is for them a personal experience, an adventure."[1]

1.2.2 Conventions of Old Age

When writers grow old they do not encounter a "neutral" state which they discover for the first time. Age is, as I have suggested, a system of conventions, expectations and constraints imposed by society and by the writer's own internalized expectations. The discourse appropriate to the aged is determined both by these factors and, more diachronically, by the tradition of literature on and from the aged which Simone de Beauvoir has described, from Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonos and Cicero's De Senectute to Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman. The response of the individual writer to these conventions is an important element in any late phase: Yeats aligns himself with the blind Oedipus and Lear or Timon, Robert Penn Warren imagines himself as an ancient Indian patriarch; even "youth" poets like Allen Ginsberg have had recourse to traditional ideas of the patterns of a life as they age.

The broadest context within which the old writer writes is that of society's attitudes towards the aged. These have changed a good deal over the last three centuries. The position of the aged has always, as

1. De Beauvoir, p. 101.

de Beauvoir suggests, been dependent on their economic and social standing, and they have always existed in a state where the ideal of the aged patriach has been sustainable by only a few: the picture of the aged as miserable, decrepit, and powerless is more familiar up to the Renaissance.[1] At that point, a greater idealization of the aged begins to appear, reaching its most extreme point in the 19th century, with an attitude to the aged (at least among the middle classes) which often bordered on the sentimental; though here as elsewhere we should be aware of the distance between the ideal and the reality of the treatment of the aged.[2]

David Fischer suggests that in America the position was slightly different: the aged were venerated within an essentially Puritan tradition up until about 1770, a revolution in attitudes in the period 1770-1820 seeing the rise of the cult of youth.[3] Literary figures like Whitman who later idealised old age were, he suggests, fighting a trend of which Emerson's more negative view was typical. A number of recent writers have seen this trend extended into our own century: the aged are, like death itself, institutionalized and pushed to the periphery of human affairs.[4]

1. De Beauvoir, pp. 88-215, esp. pp. 88-101.
2. De Beauvoir, pp. 199-201.
3. David H. Fischer, Growing Old in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 99-101.
4. See, for example, Robert Butler's polemical Why Survive? (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); and, on death, Robert Blauner, "Bureaucratization of Modern Death Control," Psychiatry, Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processess, 29 (1966), 378-94.

It is not possible, however, simply to apply such a (brief) survey of attitudes to writers, despite obvious parallels between, say, the cult of youth which Fischer describes and some romantic programmes. The reason for this is partly that writers do not simply reflect social attitudes. Often, they articulate excluded values -- and their excluded status can be a strength. The old man or woman thus remains a heroic possibility in an adversarial literary culture which emphasizes the inner life, dwelling on the marginalization of the creative artist, and on insight rather than sight. Maeterlinck, for example, singles out the old man in his essay "The Tragical in Daily Life," as the embodiment of a "somnambulistic drama" which is more real than the ravings of an Othello.[1] In the internalised dramas of much modern literature it is the old character who best supplies the required richness of memory and meditation, from Ibsen's Borkman and Henry James's old men to Beckett's Krapp and Bellow's Mr. Sammler. The interest of such characters is psychological, in contrast to earlier bardic pensioners like Scott's Last Minstrel; but in these characters too it is their memories -- individual rather than racial -- which supply the interest. The old poet is often assigned a position different to that of other aged, though -- as I have shown elsewhere -- this position may be an honour without content, a centrality which is purely formal.[2] The lucky poet in old age can be seen as the embodiment of a culture and a tradition.

1. Maurice Maeterlinck, The Treasure of the Humble, trans. Alfred Sutro (London: George Allen, 1897), pp. 105-06, 119.
2. "An Old Philosopher in Rome: George Santayana and his Visitors," JAS, 19 (1985), 349-68.

If an analysis of attitudes to old age is one possibility, then another is an examination of the possibilities supplied by traditional metaphors for old age. The most obvious of these is that of life's winter. While not the only metaphor for life's decline, it remains an imaginative realm with its own dynamics.[1] If autumn is the season of most visible decay, then winter is the season of hardship and death in the outer world; and, also, often, a season with a hushed silence suggestive of the turning of the year into a new cycle. As the "death of nature" winter is a figure for the evisceration of the drives of youth. Those forces which do rage are not within, but outside. The metaphor of life's winter thus implies a heightened dualism which finds ready expression in the picture of the poet at the fireside, in a winter storm. As James Russell Lowell shows in his eloquent essay "A Good Word for Winter" (1870), the image occurs often in the canon of English poetry, since Thomson in particular, usually centred on what Lowell calls "the contrast of within and without, during a storm at night."[2] A less periphrastic analysis of the phenomenology of the same image is provided by Gaston Bachelard in his The Poetics of Space (1958), as part of a discussion of the house. Bachelard shows how the image of the house

1. In this context, it should be noted that Northrop Frye's seasonal archetypes are of little use. His categories are applied across all of literature rather than a single life-cycle, and when Frye does consider a single author he tends to anatomize his world-view in synchronic terms. Winter as a mythic category is associated with irony and realism; sparagmos and the world where "heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized, or foredoomed. . . ." While these suggestions are useful, Frye usually associates winter with death, and old age with the fall (his season of tragedy). See his Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 192.
2. In Fireside Travels, Vol. I of The Complete Writings of James Russell Lowell, Elmwood Edition (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), pp. 333-75.

in winter has become a metaphor for the human body in which the mind, isolated from all the accidents of the weather, dwells poetically:

> And so, faced with the bestial hostility of the storm and the hurricane, the house's virtues of protection and resistance are transported into human virtues. The house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body.[1]

Bachelard suggests that the dialectics of the house are "too easy": the outside world vanishes over-conveniently, and is displaced by the realm of fireside tales and fairy-stories. In this, he links winter to another tradition; that of the uncanny, of Persephone's residence in Hades and the sun's imprisonment, and the oldest folk-tales. "Winter is by far the oldest of the seasons. Not only does it confer age upon our memories, taking us back to a remote past but, on snowy days, the house too is old."[2] The dead come back to life in the flickerings of the fire -- the voice which Hardy hears in one of his late poems -- and the author joins an ancient tradition.

All this is very suggestive of the mood of heightened dualism, internal colloquy, and isolation which is found in the work of a number of old writers. But there is another possibility within the "dialectics of winter," one which Lowell urges. The writer may leave the fireside and seek the coldness outside, whether Lowell's cleansed landscape or the storm itself. Lear's ordeal on the heath is a potent image for the late purgatorial process which a number of writers see themselves as undertaking, visible in Yeats's old men and in Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman, and even in Pound's depiction of himself in The Pisan Cantos:

1. Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, trans. Maria Jolas (1964; Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 46.
2. Ibid., p. 41.

"If the hoar frost grip thy tent / Thou wilt give thanks when night is spent."[1] The house of consciousness may be a secure one; but it may also seem oppressive, something to be fled from.

In addition to this uneasiness, there is also a common traditional distinction between two phases of agedness: one of which the old person is still at the height of his powers, and another at which he is decrepit, and suited only for preparing for eternity. The first is associated in Renaissance iconography with Jupiter, the second with the less benign infuence of Saturn.[2] The division between them parallels, roughly, the oscillation between autumn and winter as metaphors for old age, and the instability which surrounds these images -- even the tendency for death to be included as another age, which our modern sense of a life-span embraces -- suggests that there have usually been ambiguous feelings about the old and their powers. Old age can seem a period of ripeness and wisdom; but it can be an over-ripeness.

In the lives of writers, the uncertainty which surrounds the question of decline is apparent in the way in which they are received. Ibsen's final play, When We Dead Awaken, was almost universally derided as the product of an author past his best (to put it politely), despite later reassessments, and this suggestion of senility or sterility is still a possibility.[3] But it is also within the author that the uncertainty about the aims and attributes of old age exists. Ibsen's play was intended as a quintessence of his wisdom, despite the fact that

1. The Cantos of Ezra Pound (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), Canto 84, p. 540.
2. On the iconography of this subject, see Samuel C. Chew, The Pilgrimage of Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), esp. pp. 154-73; and de Beauvoir, p. 121.
3. See the summary of the play's reception supplied by J.W. McFarlane (ed.), in The Oxford Ibsen, VIII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 366-74.

it is manifestly the product of an author turned inwards upon himself, his past and his guilt; a preparation for death. In Hardy's creative life the same tension between summation and withdrawal is apparent, and in Yeats there is an uneasy oscillation between his earlier vision of old age as strength and his later but overlapping idea of it as an enforced weakness which he must overcome.

These very different images of old age can result in an instability of description of the powers of writers, somewhat independently of the actual powers of the authors of the descriptions. At one extreme is the literally god-like powers ascribed to old age by Wordsworth. It is

> a place of power,
> A throne that may be likened unto his,
> Who, in some placid day of summer, looks
> Down from a mountain-top . . .

-- though Wordsworth has more pessimistic descriptions of "aged Winter's desolate sway."[1] At the other extreme are the characterizations of age in poems like Arnold's "Growing Old": a time of desiccation and desolation. Of course, such stereotypes are often imposed on old age from without, and reflect the expectations of the writer. "Little Gidding" is not the literature of old age, but of a particular temperament which (in 1942) expects little improvement in the world. The end of life becomes another of the terminal fictions which Frank Kermode describes. In Eliot it is seen in terms of decline (the three "gifts reserved for age" he ironically describes) unless the old man can remain an explorer and go on to complete the circle of a mythic voyage; but here he too is idealizing, writing in terms which echo those of Tennyson's "Ulysses."

1. The Excursion, Bk. IX, 11. 55-58; Bk. V, 1. 410. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, V, ed. E. De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), 288, 166.

One way of examining old age in writers is thus simply to examine the debate about aging which is visible within their works, in particular the interaction of the conventional views sketched above with their experience as they age. Many writers, including all those studied here, write about old figures from early in their career: the old man as bard or prophet in Yeats, the sage in Stevens. Hardy planned a volume about winter many decades before his death, and Stevens explored the metaphysics of winter early in his career, before returning to them later in life; and in each case we can measure a change in attitudes. Often, the debate about aging is conducted quite openly. Wordsworth is a good example, as the quotations above suggest. The Wanderer fortifies himself against the distancing of youthful sources of energy by putting his faith in "abstract intelligence" and the Almightly. But in adopting such a position he only emphazises his losses, and that it is "the most difficult of tasks to keep / Heights which the soul is competent to gain."[1] His career had lost that sense both of self-discovery and recurrent crisis which had characterized it, and the conventional solution was inadequate. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that the most successful writers in old age are those who prepare a given picture of their old age early in life (like Swift and his Struldbrugs, or Hugo's patriarchs).[2] But in fact, the opposite may also be true: Samuel Johnson depicted the ending of the lives of his autobiographical subjects, as Isobel Grundy shows, as often arbitrary and dissonant; whereas in his own ending he was to find an extraordinary courage.[3] A

1. The Excursion, Bk. IV, 11. 138-39. Ibid., p. 113.
2. De Beauvoir, p. 296.
3. See Isobel Grundy, "Samuel Johnson: A Writer of Lives Looks at Death," MLR, 79 (1984), 257-65; B.L. Reid, "How to Die: The Example of Samuel Johnson," SR, 85 (1977), 612-30.

number of writers are forced to abandon their earlier idealizations of old age for more realistic -- and often less palatable -- portraits of their own state, like the violent late images of old age which we see in Yeats, or the unflattering but honest portrayal of his age which Whitman provides.[1] Alternatively, they may seek an engagement with the future which pulls the writer out of stasis, extending the idea of "growth" which is so important to romantic self-perception beyond the point of death. Of that, more in the sections which follow.

1.2.3 The Creativity of Old Age

The sources of artistic energy are always difficult to define, and when we attempt to describe them we usually resort to metaphors: whether Freudian, mechanistic, astral, or a recourse to the category of "genius." A number of sources of the creativity of old age have been suggested: the occurrence of some catastrophic event and subsequent artistic reconstruction, the "maturity" of an already formed genius, the slowing of the body and relaxing of poetic drives into more integrated forms. In their sources, these energies range from the quietistic to the apocalyptic, from the apotheosis to the degeneration of the artist in old age. The sources of aged creativity are as much the subject of a mythology as the aged themselves.

Perhaps the best example of this is the common claim that the old author has a relaxed relationship with tradition and the formal

1. See D.B. Stauffer, "Walt Whitman and Old Age," WWR, 24 (1978), 142- 48, for a discussion of the tension between ideal and reality in Whitman's late career.

constraints of art. Such claims are most often made of Shakespeare, who seems to abandon and question the forms of tragedy and comedy in his late works, as well as dispensing with theatrical realism.[1] The facts are more equivocal. The Tempest is one of the most highly patterned of Shakespeare's plays, as Mark Rose has shown, and even the romances have their own conventions.[2] At the other end of the same scale, old writers are sometimes said to be perfect and instinctive formalists: they are the embodiments of a tradition, and demonstrate its skeletal outline. Such a stylization or abstraction is sometimes ascribed to the late works of Beethoven, Mondrian, Cezanne, Ibsen, Hardy and others. The dualistic perception of the aged which I described earlier operates here too. The old man is rather like the old man whom Descartes uses to analyse perception in La Dioptrique: on the one hand his blindness means that the mechanics of perception are more visible (the walking stick which is his "eyes"), while on the other hand he has, metaphorically, a visionary power which can see through all things, transcending the normal human perceptive apparatus.[3]

Behind at least some of these attributes lie, I think, the changes in memory and the increasing isolation of old age. Old people tend to remember that which dates from their earlier lives, or to focus on those elements of life which we see as crossing generations: the concerns which endure as acceptable subject matter. In art, what they remember is

1. See Manning, "Beyond Colonos," pp. 4-5; Grene, pp. 37-46.
2. Mark Rose, Shakespearean Design (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 172-74.
3. See Tobin Siebers, "The Blindspot in Descartes' La Dioptrique," MLN, 94 (1979), 836-42. This is, in this context, another version of the Jupiter/Saturn antithesis which I described earlier.

something like an internalized tradition. John Hollander makes this point well in quoting Landor's poem on the failure of memory:

> The Mother of the Muses, we are taught,
> Is Memory: she has left me; they remain,
> And shake my shoulder, urging me to sing
> About the summer days, my loves of old.[1]

As Hollander shows, the poem is redolent with Miltonic echo, so that "his muse is still there because without realizing it, he can till 'remember' cadences and echoes of Milton."[2] Often, of course, it is the tradition of himself that the author remembers -- as Milton seems to be doing at the end of his career, in the final semichorus of Samson Agonistes:

> But hee though blind of sight,
> Despis'd and thought extinguisht quite,
> With inward eyes illuminated
> His fierie vertue rouz'd
> From under ashes into sudden flame. . . .[3]

The passage is part self-description, part echo of Paradise Lost, so the poem as a whole seems to allude to a whole career.

It is, partly as a result, also true that questions of influence fade in older poets. They become more truly themselves in their late works: read less (as people almost uniformly do as they age), and as the gerontologists suggest, tend to work according to already existing patterns rather than learning new styles (though as we will see, this does not imply stasis: only that their course is self-created, determined by internal demands). They are thus less influenced by other writers in the Freudian sense suggested by Bate and Bloom. Where we do see

1. Poems by Walter Savage Landor, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London: Centaur Press, 1964), p. 290. I quote this comprehensive selection in preference to the unwieldy and difficult-to-obtain limited edition Poetical Works (4 vols., 1933). Yeats quotes the same lines in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (M 342).
2. John Hollander, The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 108-09.
3. The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed. Helen Darbishire, II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 107.

influence, it often seems to be more in the spirit of Eliot: a choosing of associations, a more conscious dialogue with tradition. This may be reinforced by the world of literature, as the first books "fixing" the writer are written. They may feel obliged to break such moulds, but that struggle is not the same as the "anxiety of influence" which has its origins in the battle for self-definition.

Thus, when we perceive in Auden's late work a tone very close to that of Hardy in old age, that congruence seems least explicable as influence, and more readily understood as a common solution; in this case a skeptical gruffness and a mode of thought which has become skeletal:

Mobilized, sighted
the Beast can tell Here from There
and Now from Not-Yet

Talkative, anxious
Man can picture the Absent
and Non-Existent.[1]

This abstract and seemingly "artless" mode of writing is common to a number of writers in old age (other examples include late Hugo, Landor, Whitman, Meredith, and Warren). In the case of Hardy and Auden, the style is similar as well. Both jot down their thoughts, Auden steals a number of thoughts from Freud and others (and from his own notebooks); Hardy repeats his Darwinian obsessions, but in neither case is "influence" a relevant category, even if it was in the past. They are their own strongest influences.

The old artist is alone for other reasons too. His best audience is often dead, reduced to a picture-gallery, and he may feel that he works

1. W.H. Auden, Thank You, Fog: Last Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p. 25.

in that solitude which is so chillingly evoked by Johnson in the introduction to his long-delayed Dictionary (1755):

> I may surely be contented without the praise of perfection, which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds: I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquility, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise.[1]

There is an echo of the heroism of this solitude in the late Yeats, in the attitude which Hardy at least attempted to portray in the introduction to his last volume of verse, and in the uncompromising isolation of other artists, from the blind Milton in his cottage to Robert Penn Warren in the present day, with his rural retreat and refusal to have a television in the house. It is more than the isolation of one's peers having died, deafness, a desire to avoid crowds, or any other natural depredation; it is also a matter of artistic stance and what Yeats calls the "proper dark" of an inheritor of the prophetic mantle. In such cases, there is a temptation of the author to say (as Landor did) that he or she represents the true tradition, while all around values have fallen off. The tradition is introjected in something like the way which Harold Bloom describes in late careers, but now in a conscious fashion, compensating for a sense of being no longer amid peers or admirers sharing common assumptions.

If the struggle with the past is less relevant to the creativity of the aged, then the future and its problems are more often a source of energy. What an author gains from old age is often predicated on the

1. Samuel Johnson: Selected Writings, ed. R.T. Davies (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), p. 167.

hopes which he or she entertains for the future, rather than any immediate sensations. This may even be true for those writers who have finished, or believe they have finished, their life's work. The conservative position and some of its ironies is beautifully expressed in the sentence with which Gibbon ended his memoirs (or, at least, the most complete draft of them, written a few years before his death):

> In old age, the consolation of hope is reserved for the tenderness of parents, who commence a new life in their children; the faith of enthusiasts who sing hallelujahs above the clouds; and the vanity of authors who presume the immortality of their name and writings.[1]

While Gibbon admits that old age does have its seasonal pleasures -- what he half-mockingly calls the "comfortable doctrine" of maturity and satisfaction -- he cannot really see it as having any creative energies of its own (and indeed, he achieved little after he finished his own magnum opus). For an artist to extend his creative lifespan into old age, something more is needed; something which will sustain creativity, provide new ambition, provide a reason for writing on. Often that something will involve precisely those hopes and expectations which Gibbon both smiles at and sustains: the almost millennial sense of futurity, of rebirth in another guise, or purification which is offered by his triple metaphor of parentage, religious hope, and posthumous fame.

The energies of old age are thus often far from serene. They may be grotesque, or sexual, or apocalyptic; and in general the portraits of old age which are offered here will be more troubled, discontinuous, and self-divided than those of earlier writers on the subject. An acceptance

1. Edward Gibbon, Memoirs of My Life, ed. Georges A. Bonnard (London: Nelson, 1966), p. 189.

of achievement implies a stasis which writers often feel must be resisted; and as I suggested in the previous section (1.1.2) a discontinuity must often be introduced into the career in order to sustain it. Most typically, this involves a turning-against-the-self in which sexual or apocalyptic metaphors are used to suggest a rebirth, or a period of self-destruction in which a new future is created from crisis, as it is in the late Yeats and Stevens.

There are a number of results of such a process. One of them is that the writer's life and work tend to move closer together. In some cases this is because the old writer has little left but his or her status as a writer, as other interests drop away. V.S. Pritchett suggests the feeling of being a stranger in the world reinforces a detached observation in which outside events seem a narrative.[1] Again and again in the writing of old people one gains the sense that their life has become a tale, in which the truth is less important than its cohesiveness and interest.[2] The "life-review" may contribute to this process, but its deeper source lies in the way in which art is "fed-back" into life in order to write on. In a sense, the creative life becomes the only life there is, and all else is subordinated to it. In particular, the writer's own work often becomes the subject of his or her art. In the authors studied here, there is a profound alteration in their work near the end of their career. In each case, the level of signification at which we read their work, and at which their creative drive seem to work, is altered, elevated to what could be called a

1. V.S. Pritchett, "As Old As the Century,: in his The Turn of the Years (London: Michael Russell, 1982), pp. 44-46.
2. A good example is the comments made by Clyde Ryals in Browning's Later Poetry, 1871-1889 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 242-43.

metatheoretical domain in which their works signify in relation to their previous work rather than "the world." This is more than the fact which Kenneth Muir emphasises, that late works seem more significant in relation to a lifetime's effort. Rather, the energies which inform them are the product of an important discontinuity. In Hardy's work, he seems "posthumous," inhabiting a ghost-ridden landscape as the mapper of his own subjectivity and his own literary executor. In Yeats it is the self-consumption and the Orphic myth of his late stage: the idea that even dead he will sing. In Stevens, there is the role of theory in his late career, and the production of a discourse which seems not to have any "subject" -- in which the velocities of change matter more than the changes themselves, at the level of "theory."

The energies of old writers thus, according to this portrayal, involve an emphasis on the nature of creativity (and decreativity). The external world tends to matter less, and where its forces are drawn upon, they too are introjected, made a part of the self. Natural imagery in old age often refers to the operation of poetry, as in Stevens' late linkage of poetry and the blooming of the leaves upon the rock. But the poet's own creativity is more typically dependent, as I have suggested, on a relationship with his or her previous body of work which makes it more visible. It is as if, in Freudian terms, there were a topographical displacement in which the libido, or a portion of it, has become lodged in the ego rather than the id, and thus more visibly present. In so doing, it enters dangerous territory: Freud describes such displacement as potentially narcissistic, and so allied to the death instinct.[1] The

1. Freud's writing on this subject is, as his editors point out, not entirely consistent. See The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, 24 Vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-73), XIV, 75; XVIII, 51-52; XIX, 30, 46, 63-66. In subsequent footnotes this edition is referred to as SE.

self-concentration of the old writer can be damaging. But it can also release the self to view the world detachedly, as so many of the ideal pictures of artists in old age suggest. John Cowper Powys argues for such a detachment, and a corresponding skepticism in which a "pluralism" of forces is accepted as lying behind life: the "many" rather than the "one."[1] Such a "sublime and comical doubt" informs a number of works of old age, though only, I think, after the crises of self-renewal which I have described. Finally, different writers respond very differently to the pressures of old age, and the possibilities of introversion and extroversion exist there as much as elsewhere. But as I have argued, the two seem to co-exist in old writers: the extreme self-containment of the aged can reduce the world to a narrative, a field of perception within which nothing is at stake.

1.3 Literary Endings

The last works of poets and other writers are often regarded in a special light, bearing as they do the stamp of death. There is, as Mikhail Bakhtin has pointed out, a tradition of works from Plato's Apology onwards, which draw their power and drama from being "Schwellendialogue," dialogue written on the threshold.[2] Such works impose a special tension both on the writer and on the reader, an expectation that some final message will be delivered: either a final comment on the career, a gesture towards the future, or perhaps the message of death itself -- three overlapping perspectives which could be

1. Powys, p. 208.
2. Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 111.

called the retrospective, the prospective, and the immediate. The historical associations of endings, apocalyptic, judgemental, monumental, all contribute to a set of demands, and a mythology of endings, which will affect any writer. This section will explore those demands, and the tensions which are implicit in endings, and develop a mode of analysis which can be applied to them both in terms of the "topics" and the formal aspects of literary endings.

Firstly, what are the final works of an author? Obviously, one answer is that they are the last that they wrote, when we know what that involves. But many writers are opposed to a chronological consideration of their career, and insist on arranging their works to their own specification. Or they may move from one position to another. A fairly typical experience of poets who, like Wordsworth, believe that they chronicle the growth of a soul is to find that at some stage the soul seems to be fully explained. The result can be a reorganization of the corpus like Wordsworth's 1815 scheme. The way in which a writer sees his or her corpus will, in fact, determine the weight that is placed on endings, and the construction of the "final" work. It is common for poets to write a "last" poem relatively early in their career, and to place it, like Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar," at the end of all subsequent editions. In such case, construction replaces inspiration, but their last works (chronologically) may nevertheless carry a different quality of "finality."

There is a further class of poems which may be neither placed at the end of works, nor last written, but which nevertheless seem to the reader to be "final" in some sense or other, because they sum up recurrent themes in a writer's career, or confront death, or have the intensity related to "last things." Often the writer will tell us this. We have no difficulty seeing "Under Ben Bulben" as in some senses a last poem: Yeats's editors confirmed that impression by moving it to the end of his Collected Poems.[1] Such judgements are dependent not only on the indicators placed in the text (Yeats's testamentary rhetoric) but also on the reader's response. This accounts for some differences of opinion over what the "last" poem is, and also begs a number of questions about intention and understanding on the part of the writer. Yeats had written another poetic testament some years earlier in "The Tower": "It is time that I wrote my will. . . ." If he had (unexpectedly) died then, would we have seen it as a "last poem" in the same way? The problem is particularly acute for writers who die suddenly. It takes a brave critic to assert, as Harold Bloom does, that Shelley's "The Triumph of Life" is a fully-formed final poem, despite the historical tendency for readers to see its ending as conscious.[2] Another problem in "locating" endings is encountered with writers who write in different genres. We can read D.H. Lawrence's career very differently depending on whether we take as its final work the poetic sequence describing his journey into death, or the

1. See Appendix 2.
2. Harold Bloom, Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.99. For an excellent discussion of the difficulties presented by this fragment, see Balachandra Rajan, The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 184-210.

endlessly repetitive stutterings of his Apocalyse, written in his final winter. The careers of Eliot, Pound, Beckett and others who write in modes as varied as prose, translation, poetry, drama, autobiography, and in some cases the literary letter, all present similar problems; and as I suggested in the introduction, different genres also imply different levels of self-expression and problems of "voice".

In fact, the topic of "endings" itself generates a number of these questions and possibilities. The ending forces us, and the writer, to ask what it is that it is ending. Is the corpus simply a collection of texts, which can be ordered at will? Is writing a continuing self-dramatization, dependent upon a chronology? If a writer sees his or her career in organic terms, then that will impose certain demands on its ending: perhaps some imitation of death, like that which D.H. Lawrence produces in his death sequence. If it is seen as a finished whole, a monument, then that will effect the ending, which will be more like the epitaph or formal closural poem consigning it to posterity ("L'envoy"). Poets may even offer poems which explore these divergent possibilities. It is thus not only that, as Lawrence Lipking points out, the poems which we take as "final" are the result of a complex negotiation between writer and reader; it is also that in considering "endings" we confront the question of how we ourselves read, and are forced to question the "natural" relationship between poet and reader.[1]

1.3.1 Final Gestures

Most previous work in this area has exploited the close relationship which exists between the ending of individual works and the ending of a

1. Lipking, p. 183.

writing career. As a writer becomes older, each ending can be his last, and in both cases the work can be analysed in terms of the same formal questions: closure, summation, authority and the relationship of the writer to the reader (to take one possible set of terms). Closure is a subject which has received a good deal of recent attention, from Barbara Herrnstein Smith's Poetic Closure (1968) and the work of Umberto Eco on "open" and "closed" texts to recent symposia.[1] Smith analyses closure in terms of formal devices like parallelism, repetition and rhyme, or (on a larger scale) the presence of images which can be seen to sum up or allude to a pattern of usage throughout the work. Such an analysis is obviously useful, and I will use a similar terminology in describing formal aspects of the late works of Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens, though they must be applied more broadly when discussing a life's work. Summational poems (or plays, in Yeats's case) often occur late in writers' careers, but not necessarily at the very end; they may treat different aspects of their work at different times.

1. Frank Kermode, in The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 65, suggests that the modern study of narrative endings begins with the work of Viktor Shklovsky. Smith's Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) has been influential, though largely supplanted by the debate on post-structuralist attacks on closure -- D.A. Miller's Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) is typical of recent work, treating closure as a fantasy at odds with the open-ended nature of writing. Other recent work includes: David Richter, Fable's End: Completeness and Closure in Rhetorical Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Kermode, The Genesis of Secrecy, pp. 64-73; the "Narrative Endings" Issue, NCF, 33, No. 1 (1978); Marianna Toryovnick, Closure in the Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), the "Concepts of Closure" issue, YFS, 67, No. 2 (1984); Rajan, The Form of the Unfinished; and Robert Pack's Affirming Limits: Essays on Mortality, Choice, and Poetic Form (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

There are, however, a number of problems associated with the formal analysis of texts in terms of closure. One of these problems is historical. The idea of closure is informed, as Walter J. Ong points out, by the relatively recent comparison of the literary text with an artefact; but it has at the same time been undermined by ideas of intertextuality, particularly in this century.[1] The influence of the aesthetics of post-structuralism, and also (putatively) of post-Modernism is illustrated by Ronald Bush's reading of The Four Quartets -- the poems in which Kathleen Woodward sees a strong closing to Eliot's career. Bush sees Eliot as attempting to "follow Mallarmé" towards a poetry in which closure is impossible: "If the poem, like the self, is condemned never to reach wholeness or stillness, if it exists in a state of continuous becoming, if the word by itself, like each successive act of choice, has absolute value, then literary closure is always self-conscious and arbitrary."[2] Post-modern criticism has attacked all ideas of closure, and equally importantly, the idea of the integral self which it seems to reflect. Charles Altieri suggests that "The psychological correlate of closure . . . is the dream of a coherent and satisfying representation of the self," echoing the argument of a number of other writers.[3] At the very least this means that the idea of a fully formed work (or career) is

1. Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Methuen, 1982), ch. 2. On the difficult question of closure in recent literature, see also Marjorie Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
2. Ronald Bush, "Modern/Postmodern: Eliot, Perse, Mallarmé, and the Future of the Barbarians," in Modernism Reconsidered, ed. Robert Kiely (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 214.
3. Charles Altieri, Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 148.

rendered problematic; and as Hugh Kenner implies, the shape of the career becomes the subject of doubt and debate, itself a trope.[1] Any analysis of closure must therefore take into account the literary assumptions of the writer; and the possibility of a change in attitude over a lifetime. It must also account for the failure of closure. In a number of writers the formal "ending" is displaced by a later-written piece which modifies our view of the late career. This may be deliberate (as it is in the case of Yeats, his final poems supplementing the epitaph in "Under Ben Bulben") or accidental (Hardy writing the closing poem; but dictating two virulent squibs against his literary enemies from his deathbed, as if his fears could not be suppressed). The final gesture in these cases is modified by works which question the integrity of the carefully fashioned "whole."

An even more serious objection to a purely formal analysis of final works is that it ignores what could be called the energic nature of the literary ending. If one agrees with Paul Ricoeur that the Freudian defenses cannot be reduced to purely rhetorical effects, then the same argument is applicable to endings: partly because they can be equated with the death instinct itself, partly because the end of the text itself raises the question of the relationship between the bodily act (writing) and the textual effect (closure).[2] The heightened demand imposed by endings requires something closer to a dramatistic analysis of language.

1. Hugh Kenner, Gnomon: Essays on Contemporary Literature (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1958), pp. 25-26.
2. Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation, trans. and ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 6.

Typically, last works (I am thinking mainly of poems) seem to draw our attention to the author, and to the framing devices within which the author exists, the "prison-house of art." They seek to be like the "quotable gesture" which Walter Benjamin describes in Brechtian theatre, indicating to the reader who is speaking, and working through an interruption in the text, or a pointing outside of it.[1] Authors, according to a pattern which exists from Shakespeare to Yeats, lay aside their "rough magic" and denude themselves, or look nakedly at death, or address the audience directly. The term "gesture" is one which I will use a good deal, precisely because of what a deconstructionist critic would describe as its organic residuum.

Theories of literary language which use the term "gesture" (and related terms like "symbolic action") typically assert the visibility and presence of mental processes or acts within texts. Nietzsche writes in his final work of the "art of gesture" in which "Every style is good which actually communicates an inner state, which makes no mistake as to the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures."[2] Despite its polemic against the ego, Ecce Homo is a plea that we see the author within his works, that we understand him rather than making him an idol. R.P. Blackmur's Language as Gesture (1952) similarly describes gesture as the visibility of inner states: "Gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imagined meaning . . . gesture is that meaningfulness which is moving, in every sense of the word."[3] Later

1. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 153.
2. Friedrick Nietzsche, Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 74. On the text as performance in Ecce Homo, see Michael Ryan, "The Act," Glyph, 2 (1977), 64-87.
3. R.P. Blackmur, Language as Gesture (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), p. 6. The paper which gives the book its title dates from 1942.

phenomenological writers have extended such ideas, seeing gesture in language as, like voice, a figure for the realization of the "body" in the act of performance or reading -- a version of the incarnational paradox in which the desire of the individual writer transcends the textuality of the text.[1] Gesture is also often associated with ritual and the primitive basis of language, as it was in earlier philosophers of language like Vico and Blair; as well as the performative aspects of language analysed by Austin and Searle, the gesture imitating or alluding to some real-life situation.[2] Finally, as John Braun points out in The Apostrophic Gesture (1971), gesture, like speech, presupposes an audience, unlike the solitary act of writing.[3] In practice, such analysis is often a vague juggling of metaphors; but I think that it is of some use when examining literary endings, given the way in which they force the reality of death into our awareness, reminding us of the absence (and imagined presence) of the living body. Paul de Man argues that this, for the reader, is even the case for such poems as Shelley's "The Triumph of Life." It becomes:

> a fragment brought about by the actual death and subsequent disfigurement of Shelley's body. . . . This defaced body is present in the last manuscript page and has become an inseparable part of the poem. At this point, figuration and cognition are actually interrupted by an event which shapes the text but which is not present in its represented or articulated meaning.[4]

1. See, for example, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, The World's Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Interpretation (University: University of Alabama Press, 1979). pp. 56-57. On the desire for a pure language of the body in Artaud's work, see Derrida's "The Theatre of Cruelty," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 240-47.
2. For a discussion of such theories, see Tzvetan Todorov, Theories of the Symbol, trans. Katherine Porter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), pp. 228-36.
3. John T. Braun, The Apostrophic Gesture (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 81.
4. Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in Harold Bloom et al., Deconstruction and Criticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 66-67.

There is a further reason for a discussion of endings in terms of "final gestures." It is that the writer's hand is itself curiously recurrent in literary endings: an image for the self-conscious nature of literary art, but also for the necessary connection between the physical act of writing and the continuation of the text up to the point where it is finished and released to posterity. Recent discussion of this topos has centred upon Keats's mysterious fragment "This living hand." Various dramatic contexts have been suggested for it, but as Jonathan Culler suggests it works most powerfully for the reader if it is seen as an address directly to posterity. Culler argues that the poem epitomizes what he calls "the fiction of address" which captures the "apostrophic now," an illusion of the poet's presence.[1] The poem becomes a particularly potent form not of apostrophe, but of the epitaph -- the sta viator which demands our attention from the grave. This reading depends, as Lawrence Lipking points out, on a reader-centred criticism: the ambiguities of context and authorial intention are avoided. But even within Culler's reading we can see another possible context, in which Keats stares at his own hand, becoming aware of the way in which his writing will survive him, in which he writes across the divide of his own death. The hand becomes drained of blood, a mere textual artefact or remainder, perhaps even a thing of horror. If, as Thomas Mann says, "all art bears the sign, the scar, of the utmost," then in Keats's poet that sense of extremity is at its most pronounced.[2]

1. Jonathan Culler, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 153-54. For recent commentary on this poem, see also Lipking, pp. 180-84; and Richard Macksey, "Keats and the Poetics of Extremity," MLN, 99 (1984), 845-84.
2. Thomas Mann, The Genesis of a Novel, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 127.

Keats's fragment seems to draw, unconsciously one supposes, on a tradition which had existed both in popular culture and in "higher" art forms. Hands as a vehicle of self-consciousness are a common motif throughout Renaissance art, in particular in those works which exploit the dramatic possibilities of gesture to draw our attention out of the frame. Mary Ann Caws and James Mirollo both examine gestures in Mannerist and other painting and poetry and detect a preoccupation with designation and the creative process.[1] The touch of the hand, as in Michaelangelo's Creation of Adam, suggests life-giving powers. And like artists, poets have often used touch as a metaphor for the physicality of their presence -- Milton's "forced fingers rude" in "Lycidas" contrasting with King's distant heavenly voice -- though here the image becomes entwined with various others: the hand which plucks the strings, and the hand which holds the pen. To imagine the writer's hand is to imagine the creative act, with all its attendant difficulties and dangers, a fact which is exploited by a number of Modernist -- or perhaps post-Modernist -- works, from Maurice Blanchot's L'Arrêt de mort (1948) to John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975). The English Surrealist David Gascoyne even managed to produce a poem entitled "The Writer's Hand," giving a name to what could almost be a sub-genre.[2]

1. Mary Ann Caws, The Eye in the Text: Essays on Perception, Mannerist to Modern (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), ch. 4: James V. Mirollo, Mannerism and Renaissance Poetry: Concept, Mode, Inner Design (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), ch. 4. Caws links mannerist preoccupation with designation to surrealist practice; Mirollo points out "the isolation of the disembodied hand from all personal and social contexts [in one particular example]. It has become pure symbol . . ." (p. 148).
2. David Gascoyne, Poems 1937-1942 (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1943), pp. 35-36.

Many of these works suggest, however, that other possibility which I suggested. The mirror-like image of creation in Michaelangelo's painting implies a reciprocity in which the creator confronts the thing which he has created as the "other." The hand which suspends death also writes a "death sentence," as Blanchot's punning title suggests: it involves the writer in an awareness of his death as well as his immortality. We could say that the writer's hand is a "left" hand -- it endures, is left over when he or she dies, and can at times seem "sinister."

This, I think, is what lies at least to some extent behind those tales in which there is a detached, ghostly hand. Some of them descend from the ancient folk-story of the "Hand of Glory" which finds its way into the first edition of The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner and forms one of the Ingoldsby Legends: the story of a magically prepared hand which is used to immobilize those at whom it is pointed.[1] Other works, like Maupassant's story "The Hand," simply use it as a surrogate for the person or monster who will not die. Finally, the hand may be used to represent the act of writing into death. I will quote a Gothic version of this from one of Marie Corelli's novels, simply because it is so good, in its own way:

> Let me write on, -- write on, with this dead fleshly hand, . . . one moment more time, dread God! . . . one moment more to write the truth, -- the terrible truth of Death whose darkest secret, Life, is unknown to men! I live! -- a new, strong, impetuous vitality possesses me, though my mortal body is nearly dead. Faint gasps and weak shudderings affect it still. -- and I, outside it and no longer of it, propel its perishing hand to write these final words -- I live! To my despair and terror, -- to my remorse and agony, I live![2]

1. See John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (London: Constable, 1933), pp. 555–58.
2. Marie Corelli, The Sorrows of Satan, or The Strange Experience of One Geoffrey Tempest, Millionaire (London: Methuen, 1895), p. 423.

For all its extravagance, this passage shares a good deal with Keats's poem, and with other works which attempt to convey the experience of the writer writing his or her way into death -- D.H. Lawrence's final sequence, for example. It captures the presence of death, and imitates its spasms right down to the blot which ends the manuscript. It suggests survival as well as decay, and the mise en abîme of self-consciousness which is emphasized by the way in which the writer, Sibyl, has been found dead from the poison she swallowed, gazing lifelessly into her mirror.

Such moments are not, of course, necessarily attached to late careers of writers. They involve any point of heightened self-consciousness at which the idea of the author's presence and authorising signature become important. But where the idea of authority itself is questioned, the signature becomes problematic. Kafka provides a short example. He often in his diary describes the writer's hand, and clearly distinguishes it from the human hand which must, in one image, hold off the world. But towards the end of his life he saw these hands entangling, his pen following his life in providing those parables of death -- "The Hunger Artist" and so on. In his final diary entry, a year before his death, he wrote:

> More and more fearful as I write. It is understandable. Every word, twisted in the hands of the spirits -- this twist of the hand is their characteristic gesture -- becomes a spear turned against the speaker.[1]

Kafka means, I think, that the nakedness of facing posterity is almost too much to bear. As he said elsewhere, his greatest fear is that he cannot die.[2] Posterity is no longer to be reached out to, it is

1. The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1914-1923, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), p. 232.
2. Cf. the last sentence of The Trial: "it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him." Gabriel Josopovici speaks in his Writing and the Body (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 111, of Kafka's fear of turning death into another story, art consuming life.

something which the artist must seal himself off from. We remember that Kafka followed the Virgilian model in ordering the destruction of his work in his testament. Kierkegaard also suggested that the writer must not become trapped in his works -- in what he called the "aesthetic stage." In his own work he displaces authority by devices like the elaborate pickpocketing of texts from all his surrogate authors -- Judge William, Victor Eremita, and others -- which ends Stages on Life's Way.[1]

In these authors' endings, the gesture turns inwards; it cuts the writer off from his posterity rather than engaging a future audience. In this, I think, they anticipate a shift in the mode of ending a career which more characteristically occurs over the lifetime of a number of poets. Keats's lines in "This living hand" are the product of a poet who is not at the end of his career. They were written in a page of the manuscript of Cap and Bells, and thus presumably two years before his death. In their anguish they seem very different in mood from the late poems of poets at the end of a long and satisfying career -- or even from the mood of the ode "To Autumn" for that matter.[2] They plead for our attention, for more life. We can, in fact, read the lines as consonant with the suggestion of the psychologist Eliot Jacques and others that the most intense feelings about death and limitation come in mid-life rather than old age, at the point where we realize that our time is limited.[3] Arguably, this parallels the way in which poetic gestures differ in

1. See Soren Kierkegaard, Stages on Life's Way, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), pp. 92-93.
2. Richard Macksey argues that Keats came to terms with his death and produced, in "To Autumn," a more serene closure, and "a new poetics at the final threshold." See Macksey, "Keats and the Poetics of Extremity," pp. 852-55. In this case, one would have to argue that Keats compressed a full poetic career into a few years.
3. Eliot Jacques, "Death and the Mid-Life Crisis," International Journal of Psycho-analysis, 45 (1965), 502-14.

middle-life from those which come after a lifetime spent in writing. Keats wished his gravestone to bear the message "Here lies one whose name was writ on water" -- that his greatest songs, that is, remained unsung. But compare Landor, writing in his eighties. The poem is addressed to Jane Smith, who had died in 1851; and plays upon the Horatian theme of a monument in eternity:

> Well I remember how you smiled
> To see me write your name upon
> The soft sea-sand . . . "O! what a child!"
> You think you're writing upon stone!"
> I have since written what no tide
> Shall ever wash away, what men
> Unborn shall read o'er ocean wide
> And find Ianthe's name agen.[1]

-- lines which Yeats, who admired Landor's late work, might almost have been remembering when he wrote his poem "Ego Dominus Tuus" and asserted that it was better to walk the seashore and write in the sand than to slavishly imitate the masters. But that was 1915, and even Yeats was to end his career with a monumental inscription. Paradoxically, poets at the end of their careers often tend to depend on the future less than they do when younger; they are more aware of what they have achieved. The gesture in these writers tends not to reach out, but to inscribe a text, or in some cases to become a purely textual effect, and the organicity which Keats's gesture demands is replaced by a clear division between the body and the text. Often, the gesture turns inwards, like that which John Ashbery describes in Parmigianino's self-portrait,

> the right hand
> Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer
> And swerving easily away, as though to protect
> What it advertises.[2]

1. Poems by Walter Savage Landor, p. 303.
2. John Ashbery, Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 68.

In such images, the hand reproduces all the paradoxes of literary survival and the deathly process of writing. The advantages of a gestural analysis is that it allows both for the felt relationship between literature and the body, and for the changes of perspective which I sketched above: the hand is a curiously precise marker of the poet's stance.

1.3.2 A Topical Approach to Endings: Three Perspectives, Two Bodies

As I suggested in the previous section, there are three main perspectives which the end of a writer's career can take, defined in terms of the "orientation" of the author. The first is immediate, concerned with the "now," the moment of death and the problem of the poet finding an adequate personal response to its demands, a "passing word" as Yeats put it. The writer may not, of course, allow this moment into his work; but for the poet who lives in his writing it is often an imperative. The form it takes may vary widely, from a direct encounter with death to a much more subtle textual "imitation" of the effects of death. The second broad stance is retrospective, it sets out to sum up a career, and can be associated both with the survey and with formal closure. The third stance in this general characterization is prospective, looking towards the future of an artist's works, and towards an audience. Again, the relevance of this category will depend on a number of historical and individual categories; and we will see a range of statements, from a complete denial of posterity's relevance through to the belief that an author's real audience lies in the future -- the belief of the "untimely man."

These categories are broad, but they are I think useful, and often find parallels in the taxonomies which a number of writers have used to describe death -- in the trinity of aspects of death which Donne uses, for example, in Death's Duel -- deliverance from death (into immortality, prospective), deliverance through death (Christ's sacrifice, one's past life as a Christian, retrospective), and deliverance in death (the absolute moment of suffering).[1] Another example might be the triad of powers which Wallace Stevens invokes in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," his elegy for Henry Church, which he calls the "inventions of farewell": "Peace" which is described in terms of accomplishment and "calmest unity" (retrospective); "Sleep" which is described in terms of "Generations of the imagination" and that which "keeps us in our death" (the monument in eternity, prospective); and finally death herself, who exists in "self not symbol," the reality of the final moment (CP 431-35). A similar set of categories is employed by Richard Burke, in a doctoral study of the uses of wills in Victorian fiction. He divides the testaments which he studies into the "memorial," the "open," and the "controlling," a set of distinctions which could be applied to all literary testaments.[2] The

1. The Sermons of John Donne, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), X, 230-31. Yeats's original plan for A Vision (1925) was along similar lines: the work was to be divided into three sections entitled "Before Death," "At the moment of Death," and "After Death." See George Mill Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (eds.), A Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925) (London : Macmillan, 1978), p. xliii.
2. Richard C. Burke, "The Last Will and Testament in the Victorian Novel," DAI, 43 (1982), 2996A (University of Illinois). Another parallel set of terms is that developed by Toryovnick, Closure in the Novel, pp. 13-18. Of her four sets of categories the first two are retrospective, referring to the shape of the fiction and to the author's view of the characters and action; the third is prospective, involving the relationship between writer and reader; and the fourth is immediate, dealing with authorial self-awareness.

first of these categories suggests the writer whose final task is to organize and solidify a corpus. The second suggests the artist whom Kierkegaard idealises: he signs off, consigning his works to a separate posterity with a spirit (in theory) of generosity. The third mode is even more radical: the writer denies the death of intention with the death of the body and attempts to enter into history.

The categories do, of course, overlap and interact with each other, occurring in the same poem or passage. Attitudes to one may be linked to the other. Those poets, for example, who believe in a well-shaped corpus may consider that their own death is not part of that corpus (though here we touch on separate issues of what shape the author's work should take) and shape their ends accordingly. When Donne writes in a well-known metaphor that "the whole frame of the poem is a beating out of a piece of gold, but the last clause is as the impression of the stamp, and that is what makes it currant," he clearly has two ideas in mind.[1] The idea of closure is there, but also that of posterity, of rough usage as coinage. And Donne's final poems, however we date them, mix anticipation, summation, and confrontation. In fact, the aim of many poets is to produce a final image which is adequate to all three of the imperatives I have described. Stevens, for example, abandons the composite mythology of "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" for a single image which encompasses all of those rather artificial deities, in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome."

The relationship between these three perspectives is not a neutral one. They are all, in fact, a product of death itself; and more particularly the status of death as what Karl Jaspers calls one of the "boundary situations" of life, a moment of ending at which the authorial

1. Donne quoted by Smith, Poetic Closure, p. 37.

self and the living human being are thrown into sharp relief, the self which exists in language observing, as it were, the coming extinction of its fleshy double.[1] The idea that the writer is "doubled" is, of course, a familiar one, and the written and human selves are different (though related) entities at all times in a writing career. But at the moment of death the two are fully separated: the man dies, while his textual corpus, the image of himself he has created, survives and has its own subsequent independent life. The idea of poetic immortality enforces this splitting into the feeling subject and the object which is the property of the community. A parallel can be seen in the idea of the "two bodies" of the king which Ernst Kantorowicz describes as a commonplace of Renaissance political philosophy.[2] In the works of late careers there are, I believe, a number of images which can be seen to "imitate" the splitting of the self into two selves with their separate fates. They include such topics as the human verses the statue, the body and its garb, and the "double." Often, poets encounter themselves as shades, living in and after-life in which they encounter their legendary existence, or purge themselves of their work (as Yeats and Hardy do). Jacques Lacan sees such an encounter at that crucial moment in Oedipus at Colonus when the old king asks "It is now that I am nothing, that I am made to be a man?"[3] Oedipus identifies and sees his own myth, and at the same moment assumes his own humanity -- as well as his mortality. In so doing he is, as Shoshona Felman puts it, "born . . . into the life of his history."[4]

1. Jaspers quoted by John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1950, p. 80.
2. Ernst Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).
3. See Shoshana Felman, "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis," MLN, 98 (1983), 1027.
4. Ibid., p. 1029.

The question here is not simply that of the "imitation" of death in the splitting of poetic selves, since there may be a relationship between the selves which is reforged in the poet's imagination -- often an attempt to energize the corpus with the spirit of the writer. If the poet has "two bodies" at the point of death, then the textual body which survives him is a corpus in a peculiarly attenuated sense, subject to all the forces of re-interpretation and dismemberment which are implied by posterity. Its shapelessness has often caused writers to wish to retain some form of physical presence in the "corpus": to see it as a living thing rather than a dead text. Such a desire is a standard topos of Romanticism, and a good deal of recent criticism has focussed on the idea of the corpus and its relationship to the epitaph which is the written marker of the dead poet. The bodily analogue provided by the monumental statue or portrait is an important related topic, around which, in all the authors studied here, revolve questions of whether the author will become a frozen image, or whether the stones will speak. As Roland Barthes suggests, the idea of the corpus is inimicable to many writers unless the dead text can be seen to carry the desire of the living writer: there must be a sexual traffic.[1] For other writers this is precisely what they wish to avoid: the monument must fix them. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore some of the possibilities suggested by the three perspectives described above; and poetic images which seem to characteristically be created by the pressures of a late career, the idea of the corpus, and death itself.

1. See Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 161.

(a) The Death of the Author

"Whoever writes encounters death," writes Philippe Sollers, articulating a connection between writing and death which is ancient.[1] The act of writing engages any writer with a perspective which extends beyond his or her own death. As Kenneth Burke remarks, "all such 'transcending' of the thing by its name is towards death . . . even the most 'vital' of language is intrinsically deathly."[2] For writers like Blanchot and Derrida, death is present throughout language: in the marking of borders, limits, and negation implicit in the idea of "difference."[3] Given this possibility for the all-pervading presence of death, the normal association of old age with meditation on death must be questioned. Arguably, death can be more strongly associated with earlier works in a career: Shakespeare's tragedies, for example, and the preoccupation with death which Anthony Libby sees as a major theme of the middle periods of a number of modern poets.[4] Gerontological research

1. Philippe Sollers, Writing and the Experience of Limits, trans. Philip Barnard and David Hayman (New York: Colombia University Press, 1983), p. 199.
2. Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 342.
3. Writers on this theme have included Kierkegaard, Blanchot, Foucault, and the thanatologist James Carse, who provides a useful survey. See particularly Michel Foucault, "Language to Infinity," in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. D.F. Bouchard and S. Simon, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977); and James P. Carse, Death and Existence: A Conceptual History of Human Mortality (New York: John Wiley, 1980), ch. 10.
4. Anthony Libby, Mythologies of Nothing: Mystical Death in American Poetry 1940-70 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), pp. 210-16. Libby wavers on the question of whether this is the result of a literary-historical period or the life-cycles of individual poets.

seems to confirm this: strong feeling about mortality is more characteristic of the mid-life than of old age, since in the latter death is a familiar companion rather than a crushing limitation.[1]

Nevertheless, death is according to the Western tradition an important moment, as Louis Marin suggests "the ultimate experience in which each man singularly identifies himself in his particular truth, in his propriety (dans son propre)."[2] In the nineteenth century the depiction of the "good death" reached a peak of popularity: a fact perhaps related to the philosophies of authentic death in writers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Rilke.[3] For later writers, most intensely in Unamuno and the existentialists, death is, as one critic put it, "an experience that must be recognised, whether in a revised scheme of the self's relationship to eternity or as a terminal event to which the self must attend. . . ."[4]

1. Two qualifications need to be made: death as an awareness of limitation is not identical to the anticipation of death as imminent experience; and historically, the expectation of death's occurring only at the end of a long life is relatively recent. Blythe, p. 12, points out that this latter expectation reinforces modern feeling that to struggle against death is indecorous.
2. Louis Marin, "Montaigne's Tomb, or Autobiographical Discourse," OLR, 4, No.3 (1981), 55. See also Aries, chs. 3, 10. It is, however, worth noting the conclusion of Nancy Lee Beaty in her The Craft of Dying: A Study in the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), that as a developed genre the ars moriendi dates only from the early 15th century (p. 1).
3. See Blanchot's essay "Rilke and Death," in The Siren's Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot, trans. Sacha Rabinovich, ed. Gabriel Josipovici (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 144-76; and, for a recent discussion of the treatment of death in the novel, Garrett Stewart's Death Sentences: Styles of Dying in British Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Stewart argues that it is only with the Romantics that the depiction of death enters British fiction, as content yielding to "pure style."
4. Frederick J. Hoffman, Death and the Modern Imagination (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 429.

The death of the poet, in particular, has often had a special resonance: fame is purchased at a cost -- the blindness of Homer, the death of Thamyris, the song of Orpheus. Myths of victimage readily attach themselves to the poet: as Schiller wrote, "Was unsterblich im Gesang soll leben, / Muss im Leben untergehn," lines which Freud connected to the primal killing of the sage and the release of his energies into history.[1] Given these factors, there is a considerable pressure on writers to produce a response to their death. Even if not a keenly felt presence, the metaphysics of death form an important part of many late periods; and despite the fact that each of the subjects of this study write on death from an early age, it is only later in their lives that they confront it with any sense of its reality. As Sartre points out, the possibility of sudden death is important as a principle in earlier life, but is only in later life that it makes sense to anticipate it; otherwise we may, like Hardy, seem to outlive ourselves in waiting for it.[2]

"Reality," however, is a difficult word in the context of death. Given its status as a limit, an event outside life, it is impossible to "write one's own death" in any literal sense (if one excludes what one anthologist called "books fatal to their authors," like Lucan's Pharsalia). Around 1948 Wallace Stevens wrote the cryptic phrase "Illegible Events" in his notebook, and it is to this category that death

1. Freud, Moses and Monotheism (1939), SE, XXIX, 101.
2. Jean Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 536. Sartre's normal position -- adopted also by de Beauvoir -- is that death is not an event in life, and is therefore indescribable. The most the individual can do is meditate on the ending of life.

belongs.[1] Stevens went on to say that "There is no such thing as a metaphor of a metaphor. One does not progress through metaphors." But typically, death is reached for in such abstract terms: in the stylistic effusions which Garrett Stewart describes, in the gesture of detachment, in textual interruptions, and occasionally violent attempts to detach language from the limitations of ordinary reference.

One way in which we all learn about death is through the death of those we love: deaths which remind us sharply of what endures in memory, and what vanishes.[2] In each of the writers in this study the poems which they write on others tend to become anticipations of their own death as they grow older, Stevens' poem on George Santayana being the most extreme form of this. Many authors, including all three studied here, present a number of different deaths as if exploring the possibilities, from the classical "good death" (Yeats's old man in Tara's Halls) to more disturbing figures: Hardy's Horace Moule, or his "Necessitarian." Elegy closes towards familiarity, in Hardy's case a near-identity with death; and the elegy becomes, at times, a celebration of the poet's joining those who have gone before (rather than the safe dispatch of the mourned to the firmament which is central to "Lycidas" and "Adonais").

However the most simple way of approaching one's death is anticipation. Few writers approach death with the terrible sublimity of the old Victor Hugo, who seems to see it as a final challenge in which he

1. See A. Walton Litz, "Particles of Order: The Unpublished Adagia," in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration, ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 76, for a clue to the dating.
2. See Carse pp. 7-9 for a discussion of grief and the perception of the death of others as discontinuity in our own lives.

would be able to question his Maker and assume final honours, looking from cradle to grave in one long sweep in poems like "To Théophile Gautier," "To My Daughter Adèle," and "During an Illness":

> Mon âme se change en prunelle;
> Ma raison sonde Dieu voilé;
> Je tate la porte éternelle
> Et j'essaie à la nuit ma clé
>
> C'est Dieu que le fosseyeur creuse;
> Mourir, c'est l'heure de savoir;
> Je dis à la mort: Vielle ouvreuse
> Je viens voir le spectacle noir.[1]

Unparalleled as this is in its directness, Hugo's poem illustrates the way in which death is described in metaphors -- here theatrical -- which inevitably seek to make it a part of the writer's life. Many other writers have similarly, though less powerfully, attempted to anticipate or provide a representation of their own death.[2] Montaigne, for example, provides an account of his own small "death" (he had been concussed in an accident), duplicating what he describes in what Louis Marin expounds as "three figurative analogies . . . that of resemblance, that of imagination, and that of the simulacrum."[3] If death cannot be depicted, the topography of the area around it can be sketched, and metaphor or syntax used to suggest that gap. As G. T. Couser suggests, writing of American autobiographies, "the form and content of the narratives are

1. Victor Hugo, "Pendant une maladie," in Oeuvres poétiques, ed. Pierre Albouy (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), III, 187. The poem was written some two decades before Hugo stopped writing: it is an anticipation of death.
2. The literature on writer's attempts to portray or anticipate their own death is extensive, including in particular a good deal of work on Donne and other practitioners of the meditation on death. Recent articles include that of Marin, quoted above; Morris R. Brownell, "'Like Socrates: Pope's Art of Dying," SEL, 20 (1980), 407-29; G. Thomas Couser, "The Shape of Death in American Autobiography," HudR, 31 (1978), 53-66; Richard Macksey, "Keats and the Poetics of Extremity," all of which explore some of the possibilities suggested above.
3. Marin, p. 48.

often significantly shaped by the writer's preoccupation with death, even though the event itself eludes direct treatment.[1] The limit itself seems to generate its own rhetoric: a discourse which questions the legitimacy of writing one's own death, which tells even as it refuses to tell, circling around the main subject. In the poets studied here, we see the imitation of death in features like Hardy's anticipations of the reporting of his funeral (subtly modulating his syntax from present to past tense: from "I will say no more" to "I am free, and therefore can say no more to mortals"), in a number of late images which Yeats uses (as well as over anticipations of death in poems like "Cuchulain Comforted"); and, in Stevens, in those suggestions of an archaic voice in his late mutterings: "the drowsy motion of the River R," and in poems like "Of Mere Being" which hover, as Harold Bloom suggests, on the edge of the void.[2]

There is a further possibility for death-works: the apocalyptic. If death cannot be written, then the final work may be a figure for its obscurity and destructive powers, having the very opposite of the clarity we often associate with late works. The final perfection of Frenhofer's portrait in Balzac's parable "The Unknown Masterpiece" is so intensely personal that only he can see it, and in blotting it out he seems to have written his own death: what Yeats would call his proper darkness. Or, the death of the individual may be mirrored in larger historical cycles, as it is in both Hardy and Yeats: the individual death becomes the death of the world as it is (though, as I will argue, this often involves a statement about the future).

1. Couser, p. 53.
2. Bloom, Poetry and Repression, p. 293.

Finally, the gesture of death may, at a certain level of self-consciousness become completely empty, deprived of "presence." Many modern writers have resisted the demand for a grand final statement, joking about it like Gertrude Stein, or keeping silence.[1] Donald Barthelme parodies the Grand Last Moment in his story "The Death of Edward Lear," the point of which is that Lear's painstakingly recorded last hours simply reproduce the ordinariness of his life: he produces nothing new. The additional joke is that when it is revived and staged around the country he seems to have become confused in the public's mind with that other Lear, history insisting on the tragic interpretation of last moments:

> The death of Edward Lear can still be seen, in the smaller cities, in versions enriched by learned interpretation, textual emendations, and changing fashion. One modification is curious; no one knows how it came about. The supporting company plays in the traditional way, but Lear himself appears shouting, shaking, vibrant with rage.[2]

Other careers that end with jokes include Shaw's -- the puppet-drama "Shakes Verses Shav," which has Shakespeare blowing out the pretender's "glimmering light" after a debate about their relative merits -- and, in a way, that of Thomas Mann, who believed that Doctor Faustus should have ended his career, but went on to write Felix Krull.

1. See Woodward, p. ix.
2. Donald Barthelme, "The Death of Edward Lear," in Great Days (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), pp. 103-04.

(b) Retrospective Modes: The Shaping of the Monument

At the end of a career, as at the end of any life, writers often look backwards, dwelling on what has been achieved and considering their life as a whole. Often, they judge what has been done, and in writers like Yeats the late phase is influenced by such "life-reviews." The process may involve elements of autobiography, but as I suggested earlier, autobiography often preceeds the final phase, allowing a period of "supplementary" creativity freed from the necessity for examining the question of the author's status. More typically, writers in their late period are concerned with their entire corpus in a rather more abstract fashion: they produce images which suggest (or question) its totality and status. Of these, I will be most concerned with those figures which imply the totality of the author's work: the corpus, the book, the statue, the architecture of a building, the monument. These metaphors convey a sense of closure and completion at the end of a life, a structure which is realized and can "stand for" its creator. But as my earlier discussion of the creativity of the aged implied, the self-consuming energies of late careers often throw such formulae into doubt, displacing any implied totality: the limbs of Orpheus may be scattered once again.

It has often been argued that the late works of genius are "summational" in some sense or other. The milder argument is that of Kenneth Muir on the late works of Shakespeare, Racine, and Ibsen: they "round off the work of their respective authors in such a way that their total achievement seems to be greater than the sum of their individual

plays."[1] At the other extreme is the description of incipient monumentalization provided by J.W.N. Sullivan in his study of Beethoven: His Spiritual Development (1927), a work worthy of Thomas Mann's Kretschmar. Sullivan sees in Beethoven's "final stage" a "new spiritual synthesis" which is not only a state of creativity, but also a summa, a frozen and final form which includes all which came before it in Beethoven's development. There is, he suggests, an "impression of a superhuman knowledge, of a superhuman life being slowly frozen into shape."[2] This is a deliberately extreme example, but a movement from process to totality is often seen in late careers. Such a movement may take a number of forms. A work which seems a "summation" may be produced, or one which judges all which has gone before it (as Ibsen's last works seem to do). Or the writer may flatten and finish the corpus, in the way in which Henry James revised his works for the New York Edition of 1907-09, subsuming the chronicity of a development to his later style. The former possibility is most clearly concerned with closure, the production of a final image or gesture which satisfies the author; the latter more clearly involves the separation of author and his creation.

James was only one of a number of nineteenth century writers who consciously crafted their careers according to an architectural metaphor -- others include Wordsworth, Balzac, Emerson, Ruskin and Hardy (though they all used other metaphors for their writing as well) -- in what is a

1. Muir, p. 116. Cf. Edel, who argues that "aging is a way of crystallizing and summarizing the life of art and the achievement of art." "Portrait of the Artist," p. 162.
2. J.W.N. Sullivan, Beethoven: His Spiritual Development (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927), pp. 236, 254.

variation on the classical idea of literature as construction.[1] In the Romantic version which is most relevant to this study the ideal is a constantly-threatened and ambiguous one, as Thomas MacFarland has shown, but the yearning for a "unity" of the author's work persists and is promulgated through ideas of organic form and the creative or radiating ego of the writer.[2] The rather similar and even more characteristically romantic proposal that the poet's life forms a single book is also relevant; as is what A.J. Gelphi somewhat parochially describes as "a distinctively American genre: the open-ended poem written over years, perhaps even a lifetime, in separate but interacting segments."[3] The question of such totalities and synchronically-organized "wholes" is throw into sharp focus at the end of a career; though here, as elsewhere, it stands in a dialectical relation to other more dynamic and diachronic metaphors for literary production. The analogy between music and poetry, and ideas of performance, both have nineteenth and twentieth century versions, and Gelphi's "open-ended" poem may assert its location in time

1. For a survey of attitudes to the literary artefact, see K.K. Ruthven, Critical Assumptions (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. 16-32, 67-70.
2. Thomas MacFarland, Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). MacFarland argues that ideas of ruin, fragmentation, division and a hope for an underlying intuition of wholeness are integral to the self-perceptions of romantic writers. René Welleck suggests that "organic form" derives, via Coleridge, from the German Romantics, a view supported by Morse Peckham, writing about the self as a unifying principle. See Welleck, Concepts of Criticism, ed. Stephen G. Nichols Jnr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 63; Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1962), pp. 178-85.
3. Albert Gelphi, The Tenth Muse: The Psyche of the American Poet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 32. There are English examples of the same type of work.

rather than in space.[1] But however it is construed, at the end of a career that which posterity will treat as "Thomas Hardy" or "W.B. Yeats" is completed, and the writer must inevitably ask what kind of totality it is: a monument, an empty shell, a pile of fragments, a living body; perhaps even nothing, a perfect blank. A reasonably common claim in modern writing is that there is no coherent totality, a good example being those moments near the end of The Cantos in which Pound sorts the "Many errors" from the "little rightness":

> I have brought the great ball of crystal
> who can lift it?
> Can you enter the great acorn of light?
> But the beauty is not the madness
> Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.
> And I am not a demigod,
> I cannot make it cohere.
> If love be not in the house there is nothing.[2]

The gesture is one of incompleteness; but there is also here the echo of earlier ideas of literary architecture, a chapel in which we remember Pound in all his ambitious fragmentation.

"Finishing" a career implies, in both its senses, that the writer is writing his or her own death: the fully crafted corpus is like a monument, a gravestone. The subject of monuments (and the related topos of the epitaph) has received a good deal of critical attention in the last two decades, much of it arguing that, particularly for the Romantic poets, the idea of the monument (or pyramid, or gravestone) serves as a

1. See James Anderson Winn, Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). Winn argues that the idea of writing as a learned and rehearsed skill ended (more or less) with Pope: the entire output of later artists was sanctified by the unifying category of "genius" (p. 211). On the more general issue of spatial form in literature, see the recent collection edited by Jeffrey R. Smitten and Ann Daghistany, Spatial Form in Narrative (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
2. Pound, Canto 116, pp. 795-96.

figure for the absent body of the writer.[1] Paul Fry usefully argues that the monumental inscription -- the epitaph -- involves the opposite to the voice implicit in the sublime: the epitaph fixes, restricts.[2] It is, I think, just as possible to employ the opposite argument, and suggest that the epitaph can extend the voice of the writer into the future;[3] but certainly in writing an epitaph or shaping a monument the poet can seem to produce a cold, death-like edifice, a literary object. Sartre sees the well-stocked shelves of the library as full of "little coffins . . . like urns in a columbarium" which is the neutralized author; and same process is suggested by Leon Edel's characterization of the official biography as producing "a frozen statue, cold as marble, and as sepulchral."[4] Walter Benjamin describes the monument in graphic terms as like the obelisk in the Place de la Concorde: "For the immortal stands like this obelisk: regulating the spiritual traffic that surges thunderously about him, and the inscription he bears helps no one."[5] As a message-carrier to the future the monument may almost seem to carry too little of the author's flesh and blood reality, and may become -- as

1. A number of writers have dealt with this topic. See, in particular, Jacques Derrida, "Fors," trans. Barbara Johnson, GaR, 31 (1977), 64-116; Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," and "Autobiography as Defacement," MLN, 94 (1979), 920-30. A useful summary of recent work on romantic monumental inscriptions is provided by Paul H. Fry in "The Absent Dead: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Epitaph," SIR, 17 1978), 414. See also Mark Strand's prose-piece The Monument (New York: Ecco Press, 1978), for an interesting meditation on the topos.
2. Fry, pp. 413-14.
3. See De Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," p. 928.
4. Jean Paul Sartre, What is Literature?, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 22; Leon Edel. Literary Biography (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 127.
5. Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, intro. Susan Sontag (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 70.

Benjamin suggests -- an impediment, or an empty name. As Mark Strand's abstract poet laments:

> Poems have come to seem so little. Even the monument is little. How it wishes it were some thing it cannot be -- its own perpetual birth instead of its death again and again, each sentence a memorial.[1]

One way in which such doubts are assuaged is through a use of bodily analogue for the monument: the statue is an important symbol in late Yeats and Stevens, but its use has more, I think, to do with the revivification of the corpus, and it will be discussed in the final section.

(c) Prospective Modes

The act of writing usually presupposes an engagement with the future, at any stage in the life of a poet. The writer's concern for posterity can be seen in works like The Odyssey and the Chanson de Roland, which stand on the borders of oral literature; and even in the Middle Ages, where we often persist in seeing authorship as collective or anonymous, E.R. Curtius points out that an increasing self-assertion is detectable.[2] However, expressed attitudes to posterity have varied a good deal, both historically and according to the position and temperament of the writer. The poet who writes in an unsympathetic age

1. Strand, p. 17
2. On the Chanson, see Eugene Vance, "Roland and the Poetics of Memory," in Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 374-403. Also, E.R. Curtius, European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W.R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1953), pp. 476-77, 485-86, 515-18. Curtius sees the idea of "poetry as perpetuation" as nascent in the 11th Century, though writers in the 12th and 13th Centuries still lacked a proper vocabulary to describe poetic fame. For an interesting discussion of the effects of an awareness of the text's immortality in two slightly later writers, see Karla Taylor, "A Text and Its Afterlife: Dante and Chaucer," CompL, 35 (1983), 1-20.

may, like Milton, be tempted to believe that fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil. The author's attitude to posterity is also likely to change over the course of a lifetime. For the younger writer fame is a spur (to borrow Milton's phraseology again), whereas the old writer has completed his or her work, and posterity represents the future treatment of that work. Old writers have more information on the reception of their work, and for poets like Whitman and Hardy the history of criticism of their work is of some influence on their late careers. But age also creates pressures. There is less time than there was, and many writers feel a need both to set the record straight and to try to control the way that they will be seen by future readers. The "prospective" mode thus influences (or motivates) the "retrospective": the need to confront the future impells the writer to turn back and examine the past. This is true of even the most idealistic rejecters of posterity. Kierkegaard, for example, suggests that the "ethical artist" will live only in the present:

> He would therefore choose to remain in ignorance of what he had accomplished, in order that his striving might not be retarded by a preoccupation with the external . . . even in the hour of death he would not have to know that his life had any other significance than that he had ethically striven to further the development of his own self. If then the power that rules the world should so shape the circumstances that he become a world-historic figure: aye, that would be a question he would first ask jestingly in eternity, for there only is there time for carefree and frivolous questions.[1]

Despite this rhetoric, Kierkegaard displays considerable anxiety about these "frivolous" questions, introducing the idea of an underlying "plan" to his career in his late The Point of View of My Work as an Author, and

1. Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David H. Swenson, intro. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 121.

pleading that he not be misunderstood. He even introduces the idea of a future reader who will assign him his true importance.[1]

The problem of authority is thus an important concern of a number of late careers, as the writer meditates on the fate of his works. As I suggested, literary testaments may adopt three basic postures (or combinations thereof), which are themselves closely related to both the three perspectives and the division between the writer and the writing which I sketched earlier. Traditionally, the author makes his monument and consigns it to posterity -- Chaucer's "Go litel book" -- or to "everlasting Oblivion," as John Marston does The Scourge of Villanie (1599). The division of self and text is thus enforced. A second possibility is that the author completes the work, and asks for remembrance; some bonds of affection perhaps. But as the writer's "self" has moved closer to that of his or her writing, the demand for something like an intervention seems to have increased. It is the third of these overlapping options which is truly prospective: that in which the poet attempts to participate in the future of his or her works in a way which surpasses even the signals which most modern texts carry on how they are to be read (the creation of an implicit genealogy or fantasized ideal audience).[2] This is true of writers like Hardy and Eliot who try to

1. Soren Kierkegaard, The Point of View of My Work as an Author, trans. Walter Lowrie, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 5-43. Kierkegaard is careful to distinguish the author "qua man" from the author "qua author," and dialectically resolves the problem with his usual metaphor: the incarnational paradox which allowed Christ to be both "nobody" and of eternal significance.
2. Among recent discussions of this topic, David Trotter's The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English, and Irish Poetry (London: Macmillan, 1984), is particularly relevant to this study. Trotter suggests that "gestic" utterance in Pound involves the fantasy of a perfect unity of utterance and action which is constantly deferred (pp. 99-103).

suppress or preempt biographies and certain kinds of commentary; but also in a different way of those who enter the prophetic mode in later life. The prophet attempts to enter history, to be the perspective of history, and often to be the performer of history: "As I say it, so it shall be . . . ."[1] In the late careers of Hardy and Yeats the patterns of their lives are seen to mirror a general decline: particularly a decline into a barbarism of taste in which the fate of their own works will be to act as the carriers of true tradition, even if future generations do not see it. The "apocalyptic" ending thus links the individual life and historical fiction.

The "monumental" figures discussed in the previous section also involve a consideration of the work's future. The fate of the monument is a subject in which writers have always been interested: the physical marker of the grave or the memorial serving as a clue to posterity's treatment of the dead poet.[2] Sir Thomas Browne -- to take an extreme example -- counsels us in Urne Burial that "To subsist in lasting monuments, to live in their productions, to exist in their names . . . is nothing in the Metaphysicks of true belief."[3] It is in God's hands. But Browne is plainly fascinated by the fate of our bones and reputations, and draws on a long tradition of interest in the physical monuments of poets, and the vicissitudes surrounding them.[4] There is in his argument

1. Denis Donoghue comments that "Prophecy is Orphic in the virtual mode, pointing toward the conjunction of word and event in a golden future time." See his essay "Writing Against Time," in The Sovereign Ghost: Studies in Imagination (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), p. 221.
2. See Lipking, pp. 138-40.
3. Sir Thomas Browne, Hydriotaphia, in The Works of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), I, 170-71.
4. See Trapp, The Poet and the Monumental Impulse, and, of course, O.B. Hardison's examination of praise and fame in The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

both the implication that the writer does receive a type of eternal life, and the counter-suggestion that works are a vanity, and (like even the pyramids) themselves subject to decay.

The decay of monumental intentions is an important topic for those writers who seek strong closure. If monumental efforts like Hardy's Wessex Edition consolidate the corpus, then the crack in the edifice is a useful figure for the displacement of that authority and the ironies of history; as, in Hardy, is the wearing of stones themselves. The encroachments of readers, critics, editors which so horrify Pope in The Dunciad pour like a flood through the dam against history which the monument is; and like vegetation, organic metaphors bloom in the crevices, the text taking on strange and unfamiliar shapes. Roy Fisher exploits that possibility of supplementation and displacement in his poem "Irreversible":

> The Atlantic Review misspelled Kokoschka.
> In three weeks he was dead.
>
> Ninety-three years to build a name --
> Kokoschka -- but he felt
> that fine crack in the glaze.
>
> Then he "suffered a short illness";
> that's what the illness was.
> Irreversible.

The march of history is "irreversible" as texts succumb to decay, alteration, or use. Fisher uses Yeats in the poem's ending, parodying all the monumental intentions Yeats had loaded onto "Under Ben Bulben":

> Chisellers! Cut deep
> into the firm, glistening
> Sand --
>
> Norseman, pass by![1]

1. Roy Fisher, Consolidated Comedies (Durham: Pig Press, 1981), p. 9. Fisher also alludes here to Yeats's "Ego Dominus Tuus" (1915), a more dynamic early poem which insists on writing in the sand -- on the act of composition.

As he suggests, "Organic form overproduces." The author's intention to locate him or herself in the text or funeral urn has a corollary in the way in which the monument is swept away by the tide of events, and returned by its readers to the world of human life, of contingency. Despite all T.S. Eliot's support for the new "objective" literary sciences with their well-wrought urns, another generation has insisted on reading a life back into his texts: for "every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been. . . ."[1] His attempt to lock these forces within his understanding of the tradition was, of course, doomed to failure. In their late careers, poets often write such possibilities into their poetry as a mode of anticipation; metaphors of broken sepulchres, abandoned structures, shattered statues, faded gravestones all suggest the uncertainty of reputation.

In particular, posterity will, metaphorically, disinter the real body of the writer in order to compare it to the literary corpus. The monument will fail to hold the life in place. In this sense, it is redolent of something hidden, of a religion of the author and the transgressive nature of the disinterment which he (usually, rather than she) undergoes as we recreate him in another image, and attempt to probe beneath the surface of the text/tomb. The association of psychic process and its iteration with monumental art became especially possible when, in the nineteenth century, the idea of the "buried" meaning of the text was developed in the hermeneutics of a number of scholars. It can be seen, for example, in Freud's hypothesis that the origins of Hebraism lay in

1. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), p. 18. Recent biographical interpretations include Michael Hasting's play Tom and Viv (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) -- a work which could be said to re-animate Eliot in order to reinterpret his life.

the repression of guilt at the killing of a father-figure (or genius):

> The poetically embellished narrative which we attribute to the Yahwist, and to his later rival the Elohist, were like mausoleums beneath which, withdrawn from the knowledge of later generations, the true account of those early things . . . was, as it were, to find its eternal rest.[1]

This is to say more than simply that myth has a hidden truth-content. It is to suggest that the writings of a prophet (or those about him) will serve both to immortalize and to obscure his true nature, in a way which is paralleled in Freud's late admissions that he too was a myth-maker. It is to suggest that the Death of the Author gives birth to all the possibilities of pathic misinterpretation which Freud feared in his colleagues. The text is thus both a marker of an absence, and a peculiarly potent presence; and -- parenthetically -- his own writings comprise a "very grave philosophy" (the pun perhaps not intended, as Mercutio's is). It is, he adds, one more hidden than visible: "there are very few who are capable of understanding this."[3] With such a thematics, Freud is very much a typical writer in his late career, bending his theories towards an appreciation of the demands of death and posterity, his own approaching monumentalization and dismemberment at the hands of his own tribe.

Finally, it is possible that the poet may see the open nature of the future as a source of fertility rather than unease. The monument will last for ever (as Landor boasted), or if it decays it will become even more picturesque (as Wallace Stevens suggests at one point). The most

1. Freud, Moses and Monotheism, SE, XXIII, 62.
2. See, for example, the remarks in the New Introductory Lectures, SE, XXII, 95 ff.
3. Freud quoted by H.D. in A Tribute to Freud (1956; Boston: David R. Godine, 1974), p. 18.

extreme forms of celebration of the work's future are those involved in versions of two classical myths: that of Orpheus, and that of Pygmalion. Yeats pictures the dismembered corpus of the poet as coming alive and singing, just as he writes poems in which the "rocky face" which is the monumental poet produces a voice. In Stevens, the work itself is given life, according to the pattern suggested by The Winter's Tale. The art itself takes on the powers of nature, and challenges us to a greater life: as Leontes exclaims, "does not the stone rebuke me, / For being more stone than it?" (V iii 37-38). The forms of art are, as I suggested, subject to decomposition; but the result is a gain in power and a hint of the rebirth implicit in a new cycle. In the works of the most powerful late periods the corpus is seen as living in the future, with a life of its own, or to be shapeless and open (with, in some cases, the "true" meaning inaccessable to the reader because the poet has taken it with him to the grave). Petrification thus becomes associated, as it is in some types of reader-response analysis, with the individual reading: the work lives, readers "concretize."[1] In writing the fiction of their future audience, old writers confront and respond to the need for their work to keep on living.

1. See the discussion of the term "concretization" in the work of the linguist F. Vodicka, in Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti, introd. Paul de Man (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), pp. 72-73, and de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," pp. 67-69.

Chapter 2 : Thomas Hardy

Like the subsequent chapters, this chapter will be divided into three broad sections, informed by, though not identical with, the division of subjects in my introductory chapter. The first section will deal with the structure of Hardy's late career: his attitudes towards it as it developed, his attitude to aging, and the nature of the very late career which Hardy enjoyed in his eighties, almost unique in English Literature. The second section will deal with two important concerns which, it seem to me, are central to the "lateness" of Hardy's career: the idea that he suffered a death which made him ghost-like, and his sense of dwelling among the dead as a memorialist, both of which have important effects on his poetry. The final section will deal with formal concerns, including the question of posterity and Hardy's attempts to impose a closure on certain aspects of his poetry and life, and what I have called the "final gestures" of the poet.

Hardy's career, it should be said at the outset, poses special problems to the critic seeking a "development" from volume to volume. Reviewing the literature, one is always struck by the general avoidance of a diachronic treatment, with a number of critics issuing warnings against discovering what Harold Orel calls "a hitherto unsuspected order of lyrics."[1] The editors of selections of Hardy's verse have been similarly cautious, usually preferring a thematic (or even alphabetical, and therefore random) arrangement of the poems.[1] The notable exception

1. Harold Orel, The Final Years of Thomas Hardy, 1912-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 171.
2. An alphabetical ordering is used in Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Reeves and Robert Gittings (London: Heinemann, 1981), Reeves arguing that Hardy's poems "scarcely exhibit any chronological development in the ordinary sense" (p. xvii). Other selections have commonly used a thematic arrangement.

to this trend is Dennis Taylor, who argues in his Hardy's Poetry, 1860-1928 (1981) that there is something like development, or at least a "plot" which the poet perceives in his creative life; and my own argument will at times need to deal with Taylor's conclusions.[1]

Admittedly, there are huge problems in attempting to assign a chronology. Hardy's poems are in the main undated, and he commonly revised drafts which he had laid aside for decades, so that most of his volumes -- with the exceptions of Satires of Circumstance (1914) and Moments of Vision (1917) -- contain poems of widely varying origins. Nevertheless, we can at least assign a terminus ad quem, and link certain poems to certain dates.[2] A further problem with chronology is related to Hardy's method: he constantly predicts the form of his life in early work, and then retraces it in later work. As Mary Jacobus remarks, "re-writing and pre-writing can amount to the same thing. Time is trickier in Hardy than in most writers."[3] Such effects form an important part of Hardy's late self-conception.

In the thematic analysis of Hardy's poetry, there are also difficulties. The most important is perhaps that of interpretation and literal meaning. Hardy's readers often notice an unconscious content in his work, an "excess" of meaning. What have been described as elements of the gothic or grotesque are often present, sometimes intended, but equally commonly the product of forces and preoccupations which are repressed and appear as gratuitous phenomena. Hardy's own justification of such features never seems sufficient, and in many cases he attempts to preclude debate rather than to explain. The critic of Hardy must thus

1. Dennis Taylor, Thomas Hardy's Poetry, 1860-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1981). Referred to hereafter as "Taylor."
2. On the question of dating, see the note in Appendix I.
3. Mary Jacobus, "Through the Glass of Introspection," Rev. of Thomas Hardy: A Biography, by Michael Millgate, TLS, 16 July 1982, p. 760.

constantly push past barriers which the author -- and some of his critics -- has set up, often with some violence to Hardy's intentions. In the poetry, form is, as I will show, rigidly separated from the writer's consciousness, and in analysing the poetry it is often necessary to break that mould, insisting that the poems do contain the consciousness of that "Thomas Hardy" which is the object of our study. By this I do not mean that my approach is phenomenological, but rather tha all aspects of Hardy's life and work as they are recorded are of value in ascribing meaning to his poems. Partly for that reason, and also as a means of discussing chronology, I will make extensive use of the disguised autobiography which Hardy wrote in the late 1910s, tracing Hardy's evolving self-conception as it is revealed in its pages.

A final problem is that of selection. Hardy's corpus is large and, as James Richardson puts it, "jagged."[1] He wrote in a number of modes: satirical, narrative, the ballad, elegiac, philosophical, and dramatic; and critics have always had problems in judging his corpus. Some have seen a tension between two types of poem (particularly between the satirical and the elegiac);[2] others have concentrated on one or other type of poem. I will make no attempt to characterize Hardy's career as a whole, though I will suggest that there is a shift in the elegiac verse after 1918, and a tendency towards a more "subjective" stance. I will concentrate on the poetry which Hardy wrote after he had completed The Dynasts in 1908, when he was sixty-seven. The Dynasts itself will receive little discussion. Although its publication was an important part of Hardy's late self-acceptance, Michael Millgate's assertion that

1. James Richardson, Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Necessity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 77-78. Hardy himself suggested this, in his various discussions of his "Gothic" artistry.
2. See, for example, Keith Wilson, "The Personal Voice in the Poetry of Thomas Hardy," in Budmouth Essays on Thomas Hardy, ed. F.B. Pinion (Dorchester: Thomas Hardy Society, 1976), pp. 205-17.

it "had no visible effect upon the other verse he was concurrently producing," or on the later verse (except perhaps The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall), is, I think, fairly accurate.[1]

2.1 Hardy's Late Career

Hardy's career as a novelist solidified and essentially ended in 1895, when he was fifty-five, with the publication of Jude the Obscure and the supervision of the uniform edition of his works (though the volume publication of The Well-Beloved was to wait until 1897). It was a period of crisis for him, in terms of his personal life and in terms of his work, though his financial security had effectively been guaranteed. He suffered badly from the criticism which the last two books had brought upon him, and offered this as the official reason for his abandoning prose. At the same time, he hinted at deeper motives in that crisis-poem of December 1896, "Wessex Heights," with its hints of a withdrawal from the "great grey Plain" to a solitary meditation.[2] Critics have offered a plethora of explanations for the end of his prose-writing, from the mundane (the physical burden of research and writing), to the suggestion that for Hardy the novel had become too self-revelatory, obsessional; and Edward Said's interesting speculation that with Jude the Obscure the familial structures and linear plotting on which the classical novel is based had begun to break down.[3]

1. Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 452. Referred to hereafter as "Millgate."
2. See Frank R. Giordano, Jnr., "Hardy's Farewell to Fiction -- the Structure of 'Wessex Heights,'" Thomas Hardy Yearbook, No. 5, ed. J.S. Cox and G.S. Cox (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 58-65; Michael Brown, "Wessex Heights," THSR, I, No. 8 (1982), 243-46.
3. Robert Gittings, The Older Hardy (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 85. Said, Beginnings, pp. 137-39. A similar argument is offered by Perry Meisel, writing on Hardy's novels in his Thomas Hardy: The Return of the Repressed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 157 in particular.

Whichever of these interpretations is accepted (they are not mutually exclusive), Hardy tended to be pessimistic and withdrawn in this period. Describing it in his disguised autobiography, he wrote: "His personal ambition in a worldly sense, which had always been weak, dwindled to nothing, and for some years after 1895 or 1896 he requested that no record of his life be made. His verses he kept on writing from pleasure in them" (LY 84).[1] While this is somewhat ingenuous in the context of the Life, it captures something of his mood in the period as conveyed in his letters and poetry.[2] The passage quoted above points, however, to an important problem with Hardy's career as a poet, suggesting as it does that poetry is a personal matter, not to be associated with the "worldly" ambitions of the novelist. They form, as it were, a ghostly supplement to his public life, freed from its problems of self-presentation. In his autobiography, Hardy later said that his early writing of poetry was part of his "aloofness," an unwillingness to thrust himself into the hurly-burly of London literary life (EL 62-65). Thus, his withdrawal from the "lowlands" of prose to the "heights" of poetry could, in the Life, be portrayed as an Edenic return to an original impulse, something undertaken without ambition and purely "from pleasure" in verse.

Clearly, this is a distortion of the reality of Hardy's career; a

1. I will refer to this work as the Life, but partly to retain Hardy's original division between the earlier and later period, I will quote from the two volume first edition published under his wife's name, as indicated p. 4. The work has been published in a one-volume form as The Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1928 (London: Macmillan, 1962); and recently in a version which restores the text to the state in which it existed before it was edited by Mrs. Hardy and her advisers, as The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1985).
2. The Life passage echoes a letter of 16 July, 1896 to Jeanette Gilder, in which Hardy claims "my respect for my own writings & reputation is so very slight that I care little about what happens to either." The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978 --), II, 126. Hereafter referred to as Letters.

myth, as Paul Zeitlow puts it, "of retrospective self-justification."[1] Hardy had invested a good deal of his emotional self in his novels, and in this they share characteristics with his poetry. Conversely, though Hardy had always written some poetry, particularly in the period 1865-67, but also throughout his career as a novelist, he had had little success in having it published.[2] Instead he had, as Michael Millgate shows, taken up prose-writing as the best way into a literary career.[3] In publishing poetry he was attempting to succeed in a second field, a more prestigious one for an author with a firm sense of the classical hierarchy. In so doing, he would be subject to the same pressures as he had been as a novelist; something apparent in his hurt at the mixed reviews of his first volume of poetry.[4] But the protective myth remained important to him, and it is the interplay between these two ideas which largely determined his self-presentation (and often influences the subject-matter of his poetry) for the rest of his life: on the one hand the return to an original "aloofness" in the wake of the dying of worldly ambition, and on the other hand the stresses of a second career in print.

1. Paul Zeitlow, Moments of Vision: The Poetry of Thomas Hardy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 42
2. It is difficult to accurately estimate Hardy's output during the period of his novel-writing. Samuel Hynes lists some thirty-five poems dated from this period in his appendix E to PW III 354-64; though he concludes that Hardy "virtually ceased to be (a poet)" over this period. That seems over-bold, given the possibility that many more of Hardy's later-published poems may date from this period.
3. Millgate, pp. 112-19, 270-71.
4. An unsigned review in the Saturday Review, 7 Jan. 1899, p. 19, called Wessex Poems "this curious and wearisome volume," and accused Hardy of blotting his own reputation. Hardy devotes five pages of the Life to meeting these criticisms (as well as an additional three pages which his wife edited out), an indication of how bitter he was even twenty years later. Lloyd Siemens points out that of the three scrap-books of criticism which Hardy later kept, he paid by far the most attention to that dealing with assessments of his poetry. "Hardy Among the Critics: The Annotated Scrap Books," in the Thomas Hardy Annual, No. 2, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 188.

After his initial defensiveness, the growth of Hardy's confidence in his "second career" can be traced. In 1899 he deferred judgement: "No man's poetry can be truly judged till its last line is written" (LY 80). Soon after this he "professionalized" his mode of work on poetry in a way akin to his work on his novels, researching into prosody in the British Museum, theorizing about the language of verse and producing a diagram relating "Poetic Diction" to "Verse" and the "Language of Common Speech" (LY 85). By 1912, The Dynasts behind him, he was fully established as a poet -- though on the point of personal catastrophe. The "General Preface" which he wrote for the Wessex Edition in 1912 can usefully be taken as the mid-point of Hardy's poetic career. In it, he writes of a fully-rounded oeuvre as a poet rather than a lyric supplement:

> It was my hope to add to these volumes of verse as many more as would make a fairly comprehensive cycle of the whole. I had wished that those in dramatic, ballad, and narrative form should include most of the cardinal situations which occur in social and public life, and those in lyric form a round of emotional experience of some completeness.[1]

In the same introduction Hardy calls his poetry "the more individual part of my literary fruitage" and a "more concise and quintessential expression." He points out that the "circumscribed scene" which is dealt with in the novels (that is, Wessex) is expanded in the verse, in particular in The Dynasts, and that in the poetry, "unlike some of the fiction, nothing interfered with the writer's freedom in respect of its form or content."[2]

Clearly, Hardy had travelled a great distance in those seventeen-odd years since he began to write as a full-time poet. Firstly, the debate

1. He added that these hopes would remain unfulfilled "except possibly to the extent of a volume or two": he had in fact over half of his poetic output before him. Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966). pp. 49-50. Referred to hereafter as Personal Writings.
2. Ibid., p. 48.

about the crucial question of scope (which is so important in his writings in the 1860s[1]) had to some extent been resolved. Throughout Hardy's career as a novelist there is a tension between his regionalism and his desire to make general statements which apply to all mankind. Typically, Hardy read and quoted in order to broaden the philosophical basis of his writings (most noticeably in the Return of the Native). He participated in the debate on regionalism and the use of dialect from time to time, usually arguing that universals could be extracted from a "circumscribed scene."[2] But his novels had become more and more subjective, moving, as George Wing argues, "from the 'partly real' map of the south-west counties . . . to the more imaginative one of his Wessex which belongs more and more to the reaches of human relationship, of domestic torment."[3] Their preoccupation with philosophical and psychological themes had moved them far from realism, and Hardy had become increasingly concerned to emphasise that they were contingent upon his own idiosyncracies. "Like former productions of this pen, Jude the Obscure is simply an endeavour to give shape and coherence to a series of seemings, or personal impressions," he had written nervously in the introduction to the first edition of 1896 -- a disclaimer which closely resembles the equally-guarded preface which Hardy wrote five years later for his second volume of verse. But by 1912 he was willing to call Jude "a moral work" with the authority that phrase implies, and to give some interpretive leads.[3] What were called "feelings" and uncohesive "fancies" in the preface to Poems of the Past and Present were now accepted as canonical and unified within a scheme. In the General Preface of 1912 he is quite

1. See EL 63-64, 72-73.
1. Personal Writings, p. 45. Hardy's thoughts on this subject are expressed elsewhere in the Life, in his comments on William Barnes's work, and on a study of a Dorset family, the Popes.
2. George Wing, "Hardy and Regionalism," in Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background, ed, Norman Page (London: Bell & Hyman, 1980), p. 97.
3. Personal Writings, pp. 32-36.

relaxed about the question of scope: "There was quite enough of human nature in Wessex for one man's literary purpose."[1] The "one man" is what counts.

The second thing that had happened was that with The Dynasts -- perhaps the most Virgilian work, in its conception at least, in English Literature -- Hardy had expanded his perspective to the fuller stage of European civilization, while maintaining close ties with Wessex and using it as a kind of inner stage. His philosophical horizons had been extended and formalized in the doctrine of the Immanent Will: deployed with all of Hardy's customary qualifications, but nonetheless establishing the general and universal forces so depicted as legitimate vehicles of self-expression. A new formal level of seriousness had been established, and was recognized in Hardy's correspondence on various philosophical subjects around the turn of the century and in the way in which he was reviewed -- even parodied, for the cartoons which depict Hardy interrogating God have a certain point behind them.

If a new largeness of ambition is one implication of the passage from the General Preface quoted earlier, then the other is what Hardy calls "the writer's freedom in respect of form or content." Not only did the movement to poetry solve, to some extent, the problems of a regionalist, it also released him from the need to bend his productions towards a verisimilitude which could be judged by any standard other than the creative processes of the poet. As he had said, poetry was the "more individual part" of his "literary fruitage." In order to understand exactly what this phrase implies, we must turn from Hardy's idea of his whole career to a slightly different, but related, topic: his conception of the creativity of old age.

1. Ibid., p. 45.

2.1.1 Hardy and Old Age

Hardy was a writer who, in his own words, was "late to ripen" (LY 178). He often struck others as being youthful for his age, and thought of himself as someone whose development had been retarded, claiming in 1917 "I was a child till I was 16; a youth till I was 25; a young man till I was 40 or 50" (LY 179). Unlike Yeats, he had no strong early vision of what old age would bring, and was relatively late in developing any theories of the old writer's creativity which would explain his continued vitality. There are a few rustics and patriarchs who are old and wise in his novels, but in general Hardy's tendency was that of nineteenth century positivism -- to see wisdom as a function of progress rather than of tradition and age.[1]

A typical expression of the possibilities of age in his earlier work is that found in The Return of the Native, where it is suggested that it is better that the book end than it continue to deal with life after the deluge of early passion. This is the consolation offered for the fate of Eustacia and Wildeve:

> Yet, upon the whole, neither the man nor the woman lost dignity by sudden death. Misfortune had struck them gracefully, cutting off their erratic histories with a catastrophic dash, instead of, as with many, attenuating each life to an uninteresting meagreness, through long years of wrinkles, neglect, and decay.[2]

In the portrait of old age in the novel which focusses most sharply on the subject, two possibilities are presented. The 1892 serial publication of The Well-Beloved shows a protagonist, Jocelyn Pearston (later Pierston), who grows old while remaining trapped within

1. Indeed, it could be argued that the traditional novel is antipathetic to the aged, in that it deals with the themes of moral education and marriage.
2. The Return of the Native, intro. Derwent May (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 381. This and all subsequent references to Hardy's novels are to The New Wessex Edition, general ed. A.N. Furbank, 22 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1974-78).

his fantasies, marrying the third incarnation of his desire, the grand-daughter of his original extra-marital passion. He also attempts to commit suicide, since there is no "solution" to the problem of reconciling his desires with reality. In the revised 1897 volume publication Pierston remains the self-deluded man who cannot at first accept old age, refusing to "ossify with the rest of his generation" and "subject to gigantic fantasies." But in the novel's conclusion he is won over to an acceptance of reality. He submits to "the zealous wishes of the neighbours to give a geometrical shape to [his] story," marrying the aged Marcia who is the obvious partner, but for whom he feels no passion, giving up his art, and himself aging rapidly in appearance.[1] Submission brings a measure of wisdom -- he is able to advise the younger generation on their marital tiffs from a safe distance -- but a diminution of power and passion.

An awareness of old age is forced, in this novel, on Pierston from the outside, most forcefully when Marcia strips off her make-up and stands before him in the morning light, "the image and superscription of Age -- an old woman, pale and shrivelled."[2] The tension between this "geometrical shape to the story" of life, which must be accepted, and the individual with his or her ability to return at a moment to youthful sources of passion, is important in Hardy's later works, and in a sense The Well-Beloved in its two versions holds in suspension two alternative suggestions of how the author might respond to old age.[3] Michael Millgate's argument that the second version of the novel represented for

1. The Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament, intro. J. Hillis Miller (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 142, 148, 191.
2. Ibid., p. 188. Simone de Beauvoir similarly insists that old age is, for most people, imposed on them from outside.
3. Jacobus, "Through the Glass of Introspection," p. 759, argues that the second version presents Hardy as the bourgeois householder and public man who lived quietly "while participating imaginatively" in the first ending. Jacobus does not, however, suggest what special qualities pertain to Hardy's late creativity: he was no Pierston simply repeating his youthful obsessions.

Hardy "the route not to be taken" seems to me to be an example of reading later achievements back into this book: there is no "solution" within the novel.[1] Old age is simply the time of crisis, at which youthful passion becomes problematic. In Jude the Obscure a similar conclusion is reached: Jude is killed by life while Sue conforms as "a staid, worn woman," and Little Father Time seems to parody their hopes as a symbol of premature agedness.

The theory of aged creativity which Hardy developed subsequently took its first shape, seemingly, from a consideration of other writers. In the 1900s there are a number of references to late achievers in his notebooks. In 1906 he wrote:

> I prefer late Wagner, as I prefer late Turner, to early . . . the idiosyncracies of each master being more strongly shown in these strains. When a man not contented with the grounds of his success goes on and on, and tries to achieve the impossible, then he gets profoundly interesting to me. To-day it was early Wagner for the most part: fine music, but not so particularly his -- no spectacle of the inside of a brain at work like the inside of a hive. (LY 117)

This goes further than simply suggesting (as he did in another context in 1904) than old age brings "performances of larger scope and schooled feeling."[2] Hardy is arguing that old authors are fascinating for their particularity and their way in which the dynamics of the author's thought is visible. The reader is referred to criteria which are a part of the author, internalized. "What does this reveal about Hardy?" is the suggested question, as in Hardy's 1919 assertion that "there is more autobiography in a hundred lines of Mr. Hardy's poetry than in all the novels" (LY 196). Poetry is the mode of old age because it reveals more

1. Millgate, p. 384. Jon Stallworthy, in his "Read by Moonlight," in The Poetry of Thomas Hardy, ed. Patricia Clements and Juliet Grindle (London: Vision Press, 1980), p. 174, argues in the opposite direction, suggesting that the second Pierston retreats even further into the ideal by not marrying the third Avice.
2. Unpublished preface to the poems of "Lawrence Hope" (Adela Nicholson), 1904. Quoted by Taylor, p. xv.

of the subjective. Such a theory had, as a number of critics have suggested, been part of Hardy's consideration of writers since early in hs career.[1] The difference here is its specific application to the poet in old age, and to Hardy himself: a relaxation of his resistance to the discussion of his own subjectivity which is paralleled by the way in which, as Peter Casagrande concludes, Hardy was gradually convinced by his biographers (about whom he complained so bitterly) that the element of self-portraiture in his fiction was undeniable.[2]

The passage quoted above is, moreover, more specific in its content, since the reference to the workings of a writer's brain points the reader towards the work which Hardy was then engaged, The Dynasts (he was working on Part III in 1906). One of the poem's guiding metaphors is, as Susan Dean has shown, that of a giant brain, the Will, dreaming as yet but gradually coming to consciousness.[3] The suggestion that the Will is in a sense akin to Hardy in its (narrative) omniscience and creative unconsciousness is tempting. The mature author is thus identified with the Will and holds, in all his oddity, a similar large fascination.[4] A

1. For a review of attitudes to this aspect of Hardy, see Lawrence Jones, "Thomas Hardy's Idiosyncratic Mode of Regard,'" ELH, 42 (1975), 433-59. Joan Grundy, in Hardy and the Sister Arts (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 1-4, argues that Hardy's subjectivity can be linked to his view of all the arts as fused by the shaping consciousness and emotion of the writer.
2. Peter J. Casagrande, "'Old Tom and New Tom': Hardy and His Biographers," in The Thomas Hardy Annual, No. I, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 12-14. Casagrande analyses in particular Hardy's marginal annotations of copies of biographies of himself.
3. Susan Dean, Hardy's Poetic Vision in The Dynasts: The Diorama of a Dream (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 39-40. See also G. Glen Wickens, "Hardy's Inconsistent Spirits and the Philosophic Form of The Dynasts," in Clements and Grindle (eds.). pp. 110-13.
4. Dean, p. 295, suggests a congruence between the will's operation and Hardy's, as does J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 267. See also Hillis Miller's more recent discussion of the "brain" metaphor in The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 309-12.

number of the entries which Hardy copied into his literary notebooks testify to this interest in subjectivity. One passage, taken from The Nation in late 1908, he headed "An artist's self":

> An artist's self. -- "The most difficult thing in the world for any artist to achieve . . . is to express himself, to strike out a style of writing that shall be as natural to him as the character of handwriting is to ordinary men. It is a truism to say that individuality is the last quality to be developed in a man."[1]

There are many such passages in the literary notebooks, including one directly related to the brain metaphor, copied in 1910, in which the writer refers to the writings of Willam James: "He asks us to think of our brains as thin & transparent places in the material veil, permitting the Infinite Thought to pierce them, as white light pierces glass" -- the glass of each mind providing its own "strange imperfections" and distortions.[2]

In other comments which he made in his notebooks in the 1900s, Hardy discusses other possible models for a late career. He mentions Verdi, for example, as modulating from one style to another in old age, though he weakens the argument by returning to his old theory that poetry was his original impulse. In 1909 he could confidently write to Henry Newbolt: "Happily, one can afford to dismiss the fear of writing one's self out, which we used to hear so much of. No man ever writes himself out if he goes on living as he lived when he began to write."[3] He dismisses the Romantic (and Pierstonic) stereotype of the artist who burns to the socket in favour of the idea of living off what has been gained: the capital of a lifetime's writing of Wessex. This remark can, I think, be

1. The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. Lennart A. Björk (London: Macmillan, 1985), II, 198 (entry 2348).
2. Ibid., II, 239 (entry 2462). In 1903 he had copied a note arguing that Victor Hugo's "supreme enjoy[ment] was the exercise of his own brain" (p. 153), and reproduced a similar opinion of Browning's "processes of thought" -- to take only a few examples of such reference to poetic subjectivity and the reader.
3. Letters, IV, 5-6.

linked to the process by which, in the period 1900-1910, "Wessex" came to be codified into a well-mapped area with Hardy as its resident genius.[1] Hardy's talk of the area as a kind of personal property in a letter to his publisher in 1902, while it has commercial overtones, is indicative of the way in which "Wessex" had become an aspect of the author's realized and universalized subjectivity: the map of Hardy's brain and its performances.[2] The disappearance of so much of the Wessex of the past must have accentuated this feeling that Hardy was the container of a region: his mother's death in 1904 contributed, and a possibly contemporary poem, "Sine Prole," suggests that poetry is an internalized patrimony. "Moderns," who know their Darwin, can accept the extinction of the "file, so many-manned" of a family; but while Hardy is "the last one / Outcome of each spectral past one" (PW III 30), the poem's heading, "Latin Sequence Metre," seems to refer to a continuity of poetic tradition.[3]

In such ways, Hardy's career went through a period of solidification in the 1910s. The Dynasts was completed and acclaimed, the OM in 1910 was only one of a number of awards, his manuscripts were parcelled out. The General Preface of 1912 is, as I suggested, an important indicator both of his expanded ambitions of producing a "comprehensive cycle" in verse, and also a work in which Hardy reviews his career and justifies his procedures. He provides a classificatory system for the novels, dividing them into three groups -- the "Novels of Character and Environment," the

1. See Millgate, pp. 361-62. The process began in the mid-1890s: in 1896 Bertram Windle suggested a codification of the topography of "Wessex" (Letters, II, 131-32), a suggestion which eventually resulted in his The Wessex of Thomas Hardy (London: Allen Lane, 1902).
2. Letters, III, 12, 16. Hardy participated in this process further by collaborating closely with Hermann Lea in his 1904 and 1912 guides. See Millgate, pp. 421-22.
3. J.O. Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 515, remarks on Hardy's research into prosody in 1900; though that is only circumstantial evidence for the poem's being written in that period.

"Romances and Fantasies," and the (implicitly less heavyweight) "Novels of Ingenuity" -- and establishing similar categories for the poetry: "lyric," and that in "dramatic, ballad, and narrative form." This self-anatomization is less exhaustive than that of Wordsworth in 1815, but shows a similar attention given by the poet to his own corpus, as well as Hardy's desire to order his works according to their seriousness, as if somehow posterity might get the wrong idea if it were not told that some of the minor novels were "Experiments," "written for the nonce simply."[1]

If this helps to explain why Hardy saw old age as more of a "spectacle," for the reader, then what of the writer whom he had spoken of who is not content with the grounds of his success? The secret of Hardy's late creativity lies, I suspect, in his sense of his lack of an established "grounds of his success," as he had put it; a lack of a certain kind of self-awareness. The period after 1911 saw a catastrophic change in Hardy's life, effected by the coming of war and, crucially, the death of his wife. In the poems which followed, the single most important category is latency: the idea that Hardy realized that Emma was his inspiration only when it was too late. The sense of loss fed both Satires of Circumstance (1914) and Moments of Vision (1917), both volumes almost entirely "recent" in production, unlike the rest of Hardy's poetic corpus.

It was only in the period after 1916 that Hardy began to take stock, and to think about his old age again in a way which was modified by the outpourings of the previous five years. In particular, Hardy began to plan and write the disguised autobiography which is the Life, extending the self-anatomization which he had earlied applied to his work to his life and creative capacities. The beginnings of this process can be seen in the notes which are assembled in and just before Chapter XV, "Reflections on Poetry" -- both the title and the position of the chapter

1. Personal Writings, pp. 44-45, 49-50.

at the beginning of the final section of the book, "Life's Decline," suggesting that Hardy himself saw this as an epoch.[1] An entry for October 1917 sees comment on the "error" of the late Tennyson and Wordsworth, and the suggestion that unlike them he has not fossilized into "conviction." He adds "I was quick to bloom; late to ripen" (LY 178). He comments in the Life, "Hardy's mind seems to have been running on himself at this time to a degree quite unusual with him, who often said -- and his actions showed it -- that he took no interest in himself as a personage." He also comments, in this period, on his faculty for "burying an emotion in my heart or brain for forty years, and exhuming it at that time as fresh as when interred" -- an acute metaphor for his late creativity, and an extension of the idea of latency into Hardy's explanation of his continued existence as a poet.

In 1918 these considerations of his fecundity continue. He criticizes the idea that the curtailed and tragic careers of Shelley or Marlowe must be the accepted norms, contrasting these poets with the writers of antiquity: "Homer sang as a blind old man . . . Aeschylus wrote his best up to his death at nearly seventy . . . the best of Sophocles appeared between his fifty-fifth and ninetieth years" (LY 184). He concludes "Among those who accomplished late, the poetic spark must always have been latent; but its outspringing may have been frozen and delayed for half a lifetime." Hardy continued to comment in this vein. The value of old age, he suggested in 1920, is that for those who are "late to develop, it just enables them to complete their job" (LY 212). It is interesting to place this workmanlike comment alongside the reply which he made in the Life to an article in an American periodical which

1. Hardy wrote the chapter headings for ch. XV, and probably also for ch. XVI; his wife the remaining chapter-headings. See The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 206. Referred to hereafter as Personal Notebooks.

had in 1918 raised the old objection, calling him "a realistic novelist who . . . has a grim determination to go down to posterity wearing the laurels of a poet." Hardy replies: "Of course there was no 'grim determination,' no thought of 'laurels.' Thomas Hardy was always a person with an unconscious, or rather unreasoning tendency, and the poetic tendency had been his from the earliest" (LY 185). He adds later: "A sense of the truth of poetry, of its supreme place in literature, had awakened itself in me. At the risk of ruining all my worldly prospects I dabbled in it . . . was forced out of it. . . . It came back upon me. . . . All was in the nature of being led by a mood, without foresight, or regard to wither it led" (Hardy's ellipses). Poetry has now become the secret plot of his life, incorporated into the pattern of belated recognition and released subjectivity which we see in the poems following his wife's death. To age is to realize what one has always been -- a poet.

Of course, this is all a little comic in a disguised autobiography which provides abundant evidence for Hardy's "grim determination" and literary professionalism. The remarks on finishing the job, as well as all the studied comparisons with other authors, reinforce our impression of Hardy as a writer who was well aware of the need to fight for recognition. In order to explain his divided attitude -- poetry as work verses poetry as a welling up -- one must separate, as he did, his subject matter from what he made of it. His source of poetry was hidden within him, intensely personal; whereas the product of the "job" of writing had to be squared with public opinion. After "exhumation," the official inquiry.

The period of theoretical self-justification associated with the Life climaxed with the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922), Hardy's most confident and fully-developed public statement on poetry. In it, he

provides a characteristic series of disclaimers and hedgings-about and justifies his publishing a volume "at so belated a date" in terms of outside forces -- the pressure of his admirers. But equally characteristically he also adopts the stance of his Romantic forbears, quoting Wordsworth, Coleridge, Heine, Shelley, Tennyson, attacking the "darkness" of the present age, and positing an Arnoldian alliance of poetry with the forces of "becoming" and progressive religion.[1] The usual defensiveness and the sense that he had to educate an audience are there (particularly in his comments on the label of "pessimism," and the sudden changes of mood that the volume contains) but the "casual" critics he rails at are linked to the forces of darkness: implicitly what will damage his reputation is not criticism, which he says in a Shelleyan metaphor will "disperse like stricken leaves before the wind of next week," but the apocalypse of a culture.[2] His writings are established, even if threatened, a territory for which for his real readers "no passport is required" for the "new instalment." Like the late works of Yeats, they are involved in the larger struggles of a civilization which Hardy suggests (following Comte) moves forward in a "looped orbit." The "Apology" is a much more confident statement than it pretends to be, its hidden strength an awareness of his own status as a mental territory which lies near the centre of Hardy's perception of the creativity of old age.

1. Personal Writings, pp. 50-58. In 1926 he added a footnote repudiating his connection of the Church with progressive forces, his opinions having been altered by the new Prayer Book.
2. The metaphor echoes Shelley (who calls the leaves "Pestilence-stricken") but its use in this context is ambiguous: if it follows the description of the opening of the "Ode to the West Wind" then the leaves are driven ghosts (as in Milton's use of the same metaphor); but if it alludes to the famous peroration of Shelley's poem, there is a suggestion that the leaves of opinion will scatter through the universe and so determine Hardy's posthumous reputation. A fine distinction perhaps, but one which underlines Hardy's continuing anxiety about reviewers.

2.1.2 The 1920s

Hardy had, according to Millgate, largely completed his disguised autobiography by 1920 -- returning to it at intervals in order to revise it -- and by 1920 the period of intense memory following Emma's death was behind him.[1] Writing the Life had, as I have suggested, served to form his attitude to himself: he had argued for the possibility of an aged creativity, and he had, in a sense, written his own obituary. The final years of his life were, he implied, an unasked for gift. A number of critics have gone so far as to see a version of pastoral in Hardy's later works. Harold Orel remarks that "Hardy's final poems are sadder and more measured in pace. They turn backward to earlier and happier times." Taylor describes what he calls the "Indian Summer" of a pastoral period "some time between 1922 and 1925."[2] There does seem to have been periods of relative quiet at Max Gate after 1922, with Emma's memory fading and the Life almost completed. Hardy could re-read his own novels for inspiration, and could even read Jane Austen with an approval which he had not earlier had.[3] Yet this view of Hardy is, I think, yet another example of the myth of old age's tranquillity. The poems on which Taylor rests his claims number a "a score," and lie among any number of poems of what he calls "tragic memory." There is also a problem of dating: poems like "Weathers," "Snow in the Suburbs" cannot be conclusively located in this period, whereas the subjective, philosophical poems which are, I will argue, perhaps more typical of Hardy's late work, can be more confidently

1. He returned to it in early 1921 and mid-1926 in order to revise and update: see Millgate, pp. 518, 536, 561.
2. Orel, p. 117; Taylor, p. 139.
3. See Friends of a Lifetime: Letters to Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, ed. Viola Meynell (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p. 306. A closer examination of Hardy's life in this period, particularly in Millgate's account, suggests a different picture: there were a number of upsets, particularly those concerning Gertrude Bugler.

placed in the 1920s.[1] Moreover Taylor argues that the pastoral impulse "seems to die away" in Winter Words (why should it?).[2]

The most concise way of examining these claims, however, is to look at the treatment of nature in Hardy's later works. Nature is, Taylor suggests, domesticated in this period; it loses the threatening connivance with Fate that it has in the novels.[3] This is arguable for some of the poems of Human Shows, but it is important to recognise that in all of Hardy's work the external scene is likely to mirror the needs of particular characters.[4] There is, therefore, likely to be a range of usages of natural imagery in any of his works. It is possible to find just what pastoral mood which Taylor assigns to Human Shows in earlier volumes. In Moments of Vision a pastoral selection would include "Joys of Memory," with its acceptance of what happens "When the spring comes round" (PW II 170); or "Lines to a Movement in Mozart's E-Flat Symphony," in which the same sense of over-ripeness and mild self-parody is present:

> Show me again just this:
> The moment of that kiss
> Away from the prancing folk, by the strawberry-tree! --
> Yea, to such rashness, ratheness, rareness, ripeness, richness,
> Love lures life on. (PW II 195-96)

Other examples in the same volume include the famous anthology-piece "The Oxen," "Transformations" with its acceptance of death's recycling, and the deliberately pastoral "Great Things": "O cyder is a great thing, / A great thing to me" (PW II 214) -- a poem which renders suspect Taylor's claim that it is two volumes later that the cider-maker becomes "Hardy's new muse."[5] Conversely, it is possible to find in Human Shows poems in which

1. See Hynes's list of dates, PW, III, 354-64. Millgate suggests that "Snow in the Suburbs" may date from Hardy's time at Surbition, c. 1874 (Millgate, p. 167).
2. Taylor, p. 154.
3. Ibid., p. 152.
4. See in particular Terry Eagleton, "Thomas Hardy: Nature as Language," CQ, 13 (1971), 153-62; and Roger Robinson, "Hardy and Darwin," in Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background, pp. 128-50.
5. Taylor, p. 151.

the pastoral is disturbed by dire events. This is true of "The Harvest-Supper," "The Faded Rose," "Plena Timoris," and the poem which immediately preceeds "Snow in the Suburbs" (Taylor's central pastoral poem), "A Sheep Fair." It contains just the kind of scene for which Hardy's early novels were famous, but after the vivid description of the fair we are told in a "Postscript" that "every flock has long since bled, / And all the dripping buyers have sped, / And the hoarse auctioneer is dead" (PW III 42) -- information in Hardy's typically ironic mode, and more consonant with his hatred of slaughter-houses than with the world of Far From the Maddening Crowd.

In fact, in Hardy's later verse Nature is often the symbol of painful continuity which it is in the "Poems of 1912-13," despite Donald Davie's overcategorical insistence that Hardy abandons any "Platonic" resistance to time.[1] As in so many poems in the elegiac tradition, the "revolving year" intensifies grief because the dead do not return with the seasons. It is true that the frequency of poems on this topic declines as Hardy ages, but Hardy retained his awareness of the impossibility of reconciling man and nature. A number of the late poems are "Platonic" in Davie's sense, including a very late poem, "The Boy's Dream," which depicts the power of imagination to oppose the natural word. Even seemingly pastoral poems contain hidden depths. "An Unkindly May," which Hardy showed to his wife near the end of 1927, depicts a shepherd standing by his gate counting sheep, but the bulk of the poem, between the set of two-line framing couplets, is a meditation on the "unkindliness" of nature, and its message to the poet: "'Better to-morrow!' she seems to say" (PW III 174).[2] The personal, meditative voice finally dominates the poem.

1. Donald Davie, "Hardy's Virgilian Purples," Agenda, 10, Nos. 2-3 (1972), 138-56.
2. The holograph headnote read "1887," suggesting that Hardy was working on an early draft -- unless, of course, he was remembering the year 1877.

Finally in this respect, we should consider Hardy's last major work outside the poems, The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall.[1] Begun in 1916, it was taken up again and completed in 1923, and then revised the following year, a chronology which has it straddling what Taylor sees as Hardy's pastoral period. The drama was first conceived fifty years earlier, and thus is like other works which indicate a "ripeness" of conception, the coalescence of life and art over a lifetime, until Hardy could see his own tragedy (or triangle of love) realized in the story of Tristram and Iseult. But despite the parallels with Hardy's past, and the fact that he cannibalized parts of A Pair of Blue Eyes (1873) in order to write some of the love scenes, there is no return to a world of pastoral, sufficient unto itself.[2] Despite (and partly because of) Hardy's attempt to impose the unities on the drama's action, it constantly refers to antecedent events in order to explain the action and motivation of the characters, as if the story cannot be told in the "now" of a late consummation.[3] Instead, it is constantly invaded by the past, by the

1. The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall (London: Macmillan, 1923). I will quote from the revised and enlarged second edition of 1924, included in "Old Mrs. Chundle" and Other Stories, with The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, Vol. III of the New Wessex Edition of the Stories of Thomas Hardy, ed. F.B. Pinion (London: Macmillan, 1977).
2. Richard Snell, "A Self-Plagiarism by Thomas Hardy," EIC, 2 (1952), 114-17.
3. Helmut E. Gerber and W. Eugene Davis, in their Thomas Hardy: An Annotated Bibiography of Writings About Him (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1973), entry 1598, refer to the work of Elizabeth Gutbier, whose Psychologisch-Ästhetische Studien zu Tristandichtungen der Neuren Englishen Literatur (Erlagen: Döres, 1932) discusses the way in which "the playing out of the FTQC is disturbed by Hardy's repeated reaching back to earlier happenings: the drama pursues no direct line but creates the impression of a spiral." F.B. Pinion's editorial opinion that "the relevant past is sketched in with amazing economy" (Famous Tragedy, p. 237) seems to me to be misleading: it is constantly returned to. In Scene I the "Chanters" are already asking further questions; in Scene V Mark describes Tristram's past amours with Iseult; in Scene VI Tristram's "gloom-born" birth is described; in Scene VII Iseult relates details of her trip to Brittany and of Tristram's past, and so on throughout the play. Even in the penultimate scene (XXIII), with Iseult dead, we are told parenthetically by Iseult the Whitehanded that her brother Sir Kay had always been in love with her dead namesake.

sense that endings are not independent. All the characters are obsessed by past events and "might-have-beens," by the crossed fidelities which characterize both the Tristram story and Hardy's own life. Even in his dying speech Tristram recalls how King Mark invited him to Cornwall, and swells on the irony of his fate, though the same subject has already been discussed.[1] It is thus often as if the plot is a series of repetitions of an already-told tale which all the characters (particularly Iseult the Whitehanded and the Chanters) know from the beginning. Tristram at one point seems to go so far as to protest at this: "You have heard the tale of my so mating her / Twice told, and yet anew! Must I again?"[2] The most important moments in the play are similar ones in which the characters recognize their status as myth, as Oedipus does in Oedipus at Colonus, and as Hardy seems to do in writing his personal life into the myth. Merlin's epilogue to the play suggests the interpenetration of past and present, dream and reality, which is far from the timelessness of pastoral. In his explanation, the drama almost seems like a "re-shaping" of a dream in which the originating (or primal) scene becomes the present reality:

> Thus from the past, the throes and themes
> Whereof I spake -- now dead as dreams --
> Have been re-shaped and drawn
> In feinted deed and word, as though
> Our shadowy and phantasmal show
> Were movements to and fro
> Of forms far-off gone.[3]

As in Shakespeare's late works, the old and mouldy tale does not seem to matter, so much as the author's working out of a number of intensely personal themes within a storm-tossed world that barely pretends to sketch any natural life as its background.

If The Famous Tragedy is a drama more purgatorial than pastoral, it

1. Ibid., pp. 220-21.
2. Ibid., p. 205.
3. Ibid., p. 225.

is partly because Hardy made in writing it a last painful return to his wife's memory. The pattern of recognition in Hardy's work after the death of Emma is one in which, as Philip Davis puts it, writing is "consciously secondary in the writer's mind to the memory of its not having been speaking."[1] This is certainly true of the poems written up to this period; but it is less true of his very late work. After Moments of Vision there are fewer poems on Emma, and memory is more like that described in an earlier poem:

> And so with time my vision less,
> Yea, less and less
> Makes of that Past my housemistress,
> It dwindles in my eye;
> It looms a far-off skeleton
> And not a comrade nigh,
> A fitful far-off skeleton
> Dimming as days draw by. (PW II 14)

If the past is to be found, this poem suggests, then its form must be searched out in the mind's "nooks" and "lonely chambers." The way in which it haunts him has become altered. If, as one critic argues, "Hardy's poetry of haunting is constructed around the possibility of a transitory, brief and uncertain recovery of the personal past," then its spectral quality is heightened as he ages.[2] The house of memory becomes an increasingly Gothic structure in which things must be searched out or retrieved.

In this, I think, Hardy's last period can be seen as a heightening of that subjectivity which I described earlier; and in particular an internalization of life, death, and memory, which come to inhabit an inner stage stripped on human players, and the necessity for links with the outside world. There is in his last two volumes a tendency to mix the mythic and the personal, there are ballads which bother less and less to

1. Philip Davis, Memory and Writing: From Wordsworth to Lawrence (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1983), p. 398.
2. Marie A. Quinn, "The Personal Past in the Poetry of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas," CQ, 16 (1974), 1-27.

explain their contexts, and the poet juggles with themes which are part of a script which is idiosyncratic and personal. The extent to which life had become inner life is demonstrated by an important late poem on the subject of "time's etching" -- a favourite subject of Hardy's. In The Return of the Native and other novels the protagonist's face is masked by time, and others can read what is written there. But in "In a Former Resort after Many Years" it is the mind which is "scored with necrologic scrawls," while the outside world -- in the poem's first stanza -- is reduced to a parade of skeletons. The poem provides an interesting contrast with Yeats's "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" (as well as "Those Images": "What if I bade you leave / The cavern of the mind?").[1] Yeats says that his friends are to be the test of his life, just as Hardy had claimed in one of his earlier poems. But in Human Shows (1925) Hardy's gallery is internalized:

> Do they know me, whose former mind
> Was like an open plain where no foot falls,
> But is now a gallery portrait-lined,
> And scored with necrologic scrawls,
> Where feeble voices rise, once full-defined,
> From underground in curious calls? (PW III 8)

The dead are inscribed on what was once an "open plain" -- an image which recalls both the Berkshire plains of Jude's childhood, and the more general tabula rasa of the child.[2] The inscribed portrait gallery which

1. VE 600. The lines are also reminiscent of Arnold's in "The Buried Life":

> Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
> From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
> As from an infinitely distant land,
> Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
> A melancholy into all our day.

The Poems of Matthew Arnold, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, Green, 1965), p. 274. For a comparison of Arnold's and Hardy's use of memory, see William E. Buckler, "Victorian Modernism: The Arnold-Hardy Succession," BIS, 11 (1983), 9-21.

2. On what he sees as the Lockean epistemology of this poem, see Tom Paulin, Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 33.

is the poet can be related to Hardy's care for the dead, but it also alludes to the caverns of the mind of the Platonic and Romantic traditions, haunted by the subterranean voices of the poet's inspiration, again rendered abstract and almost impersonal.

If the outside world becomes more shadowy, then the poet's subject matter becomes -- as I have already argued -- increasingly himself, though a "self" very different from the earlier self, itself now abstracted and attenuated. An examination of Hardy's final volume, in particular, reinforces this point. Winter Words contains poems probably written (or first drafted) across the entire span of Hardy's career, but the bulk of the work can be attributed to the years 1920-27, and it is different in character even to Human Shows. The volume contains, first of all, a much greater proportion of meditative, personal poems than Hardy's other volumes. They are often general in their treatment of the author, written with what W.H. Pritchard calls Hardy's "unearthly detachment," fixing their attention on Hardy's self and current feelings rather than on his memories, or things which he observes or has happen to him.[1] Perhaps fifteen of the volume's ninety-one poems are of this kind, including such major poems as "'I am the one,'" "A Wish for Unconsciousness," "Lying Awake," "A Poet's Thought," "So Various," "He Never Expected Much," "Family Portraits," and "A Private Man on Public Men," as well as the final group. Hardy seems to have seen himself increasingly as a fit subject for poetry, and was willing to talk about his own psychology (in "Family Portraits," for example) in a way which emphasizes the release he felt in poetry, and contradicts the assumption that the extreme defensiveness he often shows applies to his consideration of his own

1. William H. Pritchard, "Hardy's Winter Words," HudR, 32 (1979), 392. He describes Hardy's late verse as "a toneless voice . . . from beyond the grave."

genius in any easy sense.[1]

Other changes are discernible in Winter Words, a number of which can be adduced from the conclusions of E.C. Hickson in her 1931 study of Hardy's versification. Some of these refer to the later volumes in general: there are, as I have argued, more "philosophical" poems in the late volumes.[2] There is also evidence of an increasing abstraction: less concrete nature-imagery, more poems with settings classed as "indefinite."[3] Fewer poems refer to Emma Hardy in Winter Words (only two) and fewer are set in graveyards: implying, again, that the past was fading.[4] In addition, there is a greater freedom in some formal aspects of Hardy's late works. His voice becomes more of a continuous meditation, and there is less of Hardy the craftsman. Almost all of his poems of a stanza length of over thirteen lines come in his last few volumes, as do most of those of irregular stanza length; there are more feminine endings and terminal caesurae in the later works; and there is less metrical experimentation -- all features suggesting that formal control is subordinated to the central meditating voice in which the interest lies.[5]

The meditational quality of many of the late poems does not mean that they are "philosophical" in any strict sense. Hardy's skepticism after the Great War, which led him to suggest that a more pessimistic ending would have been more appropriate for The Dynasts (LY 165), imparts a note of disillusion to the formally philosophical poems of his last few

1. John Bayley provides one example of this view of Hardy when he suggests that "his knowledge of his own genius never assumed, even in his maturity, the usual form of confident indifference, or detachment." While this is true of Hardy's attitude to critics, it is much less true of his attitude to self-presentation in his poetry. An Essay on Hardy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 1.
2. Elizabeth Cathcart Hickson, The Versification of Thomas Hardy, Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1931 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), Table I (p. 22).
3. Ibid., Tables 2 and 3 (pp. 29, 34).
4. Ibid., Tables 1 and 2 (pp. 22, 29).
5. Ibid., Tables 4, 5 and 6 (pp. 39, 49, 92ff.).

volumes. Winter Words includes the rollicking "Drinking-Song" whose chorus, as the great dogmas are exposed one-by-one, is "Fill up your cups: feel no distress / 'Tis only one great thought the less!" (PW III 247), and "A Philosophical Fantasy," in which the Creator answers an earlier description of him by Hardy in a way which borders on the gentle parody which Max Beerbohm produced in A Christmas Garland (1912).[1] Perhaps the most bare philosophical statement of Hardy's career is that in "Our Old Friend Dualism," who could be Hardy himself: "All hail to him, the Protean! A tough old chap is he" (PW III 233) -- a grimly jocular minimalism which is perfectly expressed in the volume's famous penultimate poem, "'We are getting to the end.'"[2]

Where the "philosophy" lies is, rather, in the way in which Hardy talks about himself in an impersonal fashion, almost as if he were examining the various facets of an object. He is seen as the ghost-like figure in "The New Dawn's Business" and in "'I am the one.'" He wishes for unconsciousness, he is invoked in the third person in "Concerning his Old Home" and "So Various." A revealing combination is the third-person title in combination with a first person voice, as in "A Self-glamourer": a mode of subjectivity which allows Hardy to discuss himself impersonally. The tone is conversational, the versification looser, and the reader is offered fragments of memory or experience which are no longer bound into a tight lyric structure like the "Poems of 1912-13." The author's mind is the implied (and absent) centre of reference.

1. Hardy's "It" in the poem is digressive and bemused by Hardy's philosophy in "The Dynasts." As the reference to Milton in the poem's epigraph suggests, Hardy is gently mocking his own metaphysics.
2. The phrase "our old friend Dualism" had occurred in a letter of 2 Feb. 1915, quoted LY 270-72 (also in Letters, V, 79). Discussing Bergson, he seems to both agree and disagree with the philosopher; but the point in the poem is more the persistence of a viewpoint which pervades his writing.

A final indicator of such a realized subjectivity is Hardy's late use of the ballad. As Thom Gunn argues, the various ellipses of the ballad (omission of linking narrative, of motive and character, of social and historical context) are also characteristic of much of Hardy's ostensibly personal or "meditative" work.[1] Thus, he may carry the forms of a ballad -- of the refrain "How it . . ." or "How we . . ." which he uses in a number of ballads -- into a more occasional or personal poems, for example in "The Missed Train," which probably relates to his courtship of Emma.[2] It simply begins, without introduction,

> How I was caught
> Hieing home, after days of allure,
> And forced to an inn -- small, obscure. . . . (PW III 106)

In the two volumes published in the 1920s, ballads and ballad-memory become more subjective in application. He takes and almost plays with the subject matter of his life, writing lyrics on his real and fictional women -- Tess, Louisa Harding, Emma -- which partake of elements of ballad-form, or its abstraction. He also uses the shifting qualities of such verse to emphasize the fugitive nature of his own self, in particular in "Concerning his Old Home," which presents four "moods" from never wishing to see it through to an intention to haunt it; and "So Various" with its procession of varied lovers, dunces, seers, pessimists, optimists, and its conclusion:

> Now . . . All these specimens of man,
> So various in their pitch and plan,
> Curious to say
> Were <u>one</u> man. Yea,
> I was all they. (PW III 208)

The use of such forms for the poems on himself suggests the way in which that "self" has become part of the common language, history. Hardy's

1. Thom Gunn, "Hardy and the Ballads," <u>Agenda</u>, 10, Nos. 2-3 (1972), 24-26.
2. Bailey, p. 545.

desire to write a "cycle" of human existence and experience had concluded in the "working brain" of its creator.

2.2 Topics of Old Age

In the section which follows, I will consider two topics which recur in Hardy's late poetry, and which are arguably a product of the "lateness" of his poetic career: his sense of being a survivor in an after-life; and his treatment of his remembered dead.

2.2.1 Supplementarity: The After-life of Thomas Hardy

As I suggested earlier, Hardy's late career can in one sense be seen as a "supplement" to his career as a novelist. The body of his poetry comprises a "corpus" which is different from that of the novelist who can be said to have died: a more subjective and fragmentary art in which problems of biographical reference are avoided, since poetry is supposed to be a lyric essence, all its emotions rendered public. The idea of being "already dead" is an important defense for Hardy, but as I will show, it is also an important part of his self-conception, particularly after the death of Emma Hardy in 1912: the poet is a left-over, a remnant, and his poetry exists in a peculiarly skewed relationship to his life.

Being "already dead" or a ghost was a concept that entered Hardy's work at an early stage, as part of the "sure game" of pessisism (LY 91). In a well-known diary entry of 1888 which he quoted in the Life, it is linked to his detachment":

> For my part, if there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life, it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts, and taking their views of surrounding things. To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable.(EL 275)

Couched in this way, it relates not to death itself, but to the way in which Hardy responds to life. It both protects him from life's sadnesses, and provides a metaphor for the eye of the novelist/poet: he is disembodied, detached, able to register his "seemings" with uncanny objectivity. Another well-known passage from the Life expands on this:

> This unassertive air, unconsciously worn, served him as an invisible coat almost to uncanniness. At houses and clubs where he encountered other writers and critics and world-practised readers of character, whose bearing towards him was often as towards one who did not reach their altitudes, he was seeing through them as though they were glass. (LY 179)

His "unassertive air" is thus a bridling of his own powers, enforcing a sharp division between the author and his public image. Hardy goes on in the passage which follows to say that he composed satirical notes on those he observed, "but destroyed all of them, not wishing to leave behind him anything which could be deemed a gratuitous belittling of others." Again his power is hidden, and his writing is that of a "ghost-seer" who can see what others cannot.[1]

Hardy also linked being dead -- or dying -- to the experience of grief relatively early in his career as a poet. In the troubled period of 1895-96 he wrote "In Tenebris I":

> Wintertime nighs;
> But my bereavement-pain
> It cannot bring again:
> Twice no one dies. (PW I 206)

But there was, of course, more bereavement to come. Emma Hardy's death had a literary importance for Hardy which transcended any immediate

1. Hardy used that term in one of the Real Conversations with Thomas Hardy, recorded by William Archer (London: Heinemann, 1904), p. 37.

feelings, or even the elegaic impulse in the "Poems of 1912-13," causing him to re-write the plot of his life. It was, as a number of recent critics have suggested, as if he had woken from a long dream, and at last seen the meaning of the way things "shape" (to use one of his favourite words: one which can refer both to life and art). It was also as if a part of himself had died. As he put it in "The Going," "I seem but a dead man held on end" (PW II 48). The idea of being a ghost-like remnant or already dead is returned to often in the poems which followed. The two poems which end the main grouping of Satires of Circumstance (1914) are both good examples. The first, "Exerunt Omnes," is dated 2 June 1913 (Hardy's seventy-third birthday) and creates a sense of lateness. The party is over: "Everybody else, then, going, / And I still left where the fair was?" (PW II 136). The final poem, "A Poet," is in a sense the epitaph of Hardy's human self. It bypasses the public figure ("Attentive eyes, fantastic heed, / Assessing minds, he does not need") in order to focus on the man who lived, loved, and died:

> Come to his graveside, pause and say:
>
> "Whatever his message -- glad or grim --
> Two bright-souled women clave to him";
> Stand and say that while day decays;
> It will be word enough of praise.

The auto-elegy's eloquence necessarily undermines the distinction which it attempts to enforce, but as in a number of other end-pieces, Hardy suggests that the man is waiting for the poet to die. The emphasis on his ghostliness shifts from defence (since life has delivered its blows) to supplementarity: the portrayal of the poet as a survivor, the whitened bones of spent passion his own sustenance, a ghost among ghosts.

As a ghost, Hardy became his own documentor, drawing on the passions of a lifetime and writing what are, in effect, a series of

supplements to that life. Each volume after 1912 retraverses old terrain and finds both the memory of past feeling and the peculiar absence suggested by the poems in which he fails to find Emma's ghost. In addition, each volume -- as I will show -- completes his career and finds an image for his death, so that the volumes are also supplementary to each other; something which helps explain Hardy's increasing tendency not to bother to fill in the details of what he documents in his own life. Hardy confronts his reappearance in a number of poems, typically needing to explain not his death, but his continued existence. In the first poem of his final volume, "The New Dawn's Business" (PW III 167), he explains his survival as a result of being willing to die, where other men resist. If the face of the dawn is "deedily gray," then so too is Hardy's poetry characterized by "neutral tones," as he calls them. The association of the dawn with this attitude is worth remarking, reversing as it does the traditional Romantic association of the dawn with new hope.[1] The dawn is, from Hardy's early writings, the symbol of a peculiar brand of vigilance. In a typically prophetic diary entry of 1871 he had associated a dawn consciousness with having already failed:

> Dawn, lying just after awake. The sad possibilities of the future are more vivid than at any other time. . . . the laughing child may have now a foretaste of his manhood's glooms; the man, of the neglect and contumely which may wait upon his old age. . . . the man who abides by what he thought at dawn is he who is found afterwards in the safe groove of respectable mediocrity.[2]

The "safe groove of respectable mediocrity" is the pattern of life into which the late Hardy -- like Jocelyn Pierston -- falls, allowing him to survive and guard his energies. In another late poem, "I Looked Up from My Writing," Hardy is condemned to a deathlessness both crippling and

1. The most important exception is Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," with its dawn which gathers in the souls of those whom life has defeated.
2. Personal Notebooks, p. 7. The connection between this note and poems like "The New Dawn's Business" may not, of course, be accidental: the note was one in a notebook which Hardy read and edited in 1920.

compelling as the moon searches out its victims and overlooks him; and this is only one of a number of poems in which Hardy depicts himself as reading or writing in his study at night or early morning, often disturbed by the light of moon or dawn. Writing is a activity which itself is linked to death.[1]

If Hardy had anticipated the use of the dawn in his late poetry, he had also done so for the metaphor of "Life's Winter" -- including a variant of the title of Winter Words in a list of possible titles he wrote in 1875.[2] Winter is the season of stillness and death, of the frozen survival of that which dies in the autumn. Often for Hardy it is not so much a season as the time after seasons have ceased to have any impression. A number of poems which touch upon the seasons illustrate the democracy of death and the sense of being in a final period. In one poem Hardy remarks that the leaves which survive summer will soon join the ones which fell early, "no less embrowned and curst / Than if they had fallen with the first, / Nor known a morning more" (PW III 253). In "The Later Autumn," "Spinning leaves join the remains shrunk and brown / Of last year's display / That lie wasting away, / On whose corpses they earlier as scorners gazed down," in what is clearly a metaphor for Hardy's life (PW III 17). In "The Master and the Leaves," the leaves cry to an indifferent master as they take their successive colours. He "marks" their "early going" but remains curiously indifferent. The poem's "secret" is, of course, that he has died, and once again an analogy with Hardy is implicit (PW II 434).

Thus, for the man with the "watching eye," the self-acknowledged "pessimist" in the Sophoclean sense, all seasons are flattened into an anticipation of winter. Even if his character is turned inside-out, so to

1. On the ramifications of moon-imagery in the context, see Stallworthy, "Read by Moonlight," pp. 172-88.
2. Millgate, pp. 170-71; though Millgate points out that Hardy might have supplemented the list when he copied it at a later date.

speak, into the alter-ego of "A Self-glamourer" (in the poem of that title) the result is the same, since human expectations if accurately tailored to life's promises will produce a life which contains its own pattern within, rather than outside of, the pertubations of Fate:[1]

My years in trusting spent
Make to shape towardly,
And fate and accident
Behave not perversely or frowardly.
Shall, then, Life's winter snow
To me be so? (PW III 208)

"A Self-glamourer" recalls "In Tenebris" and other poems on winter. In many, as for example "Before and after Summer," Hardy links the topic to the figure of "blankness" which we can, perhaps, see as having its origins in the "neutral tones" of his early poem of that title. In "Before and after Summer" Hardy produces a parody of the traditional association of birds with the seasonal cycle.[2] This bird represents the <u>absence</u> of any seasonal fulfillment:

Mutely perched he bills no work
Blank as I am even is he.
For those happy suns are past,
For-discerned in winter last.
Where went by their pleasure, then?
I, alas, perceived not when. (PW II 43)

The bird is a ghostly presence -- "shadowed" on Hardy's wall, blank -- and is part of a complex pattern of disappointments. The same word "blank," with its Miltonic, Wordsworthian, and Coleridgian associations, recurs in "Exerunt Omnes":[3]

There is an air of blankness
In the street and the littered spaces;
Thoroughfare, steeple, bridge and highway
Wizen themselves to lankness;
Kennels dribble dankness.

1. Bailey, p. 594, argues that the poem refers to Hardy's own life. But the poem's confidence hardly matches that of the late Hardy, whose own expectations of mankind and life in general had been disappointed. At best, it represents an aspect of Hardy.
2. On the Romantic treatment of bird imagery, see Peggy Munsterberg's excellent introduction to <u>The Penguin Book of Bird Poetry</u> (London: Allen Lane, 1980).
3. On this word's associations, see Harold Bloom, <u>The Breaking of the Vessels</u>, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 75-99.

The "blank" represents an erasure in which nothing more catastrophic can happen, as in Hardy's poem on the death of a cat: "Better blankness day by day / Than companion torn away" (PW II 435). Often, as in "The Voice of Things," it represents a mood of desolation. Elsewhere, it is a clear space for the mind's etching, as in a "blank lack of any charm / Of landscape [which] did no harm" (PW II 417), a tabula rasa on which the mind inscribes its fantasies.

The reduction of life to a total bleakness thus effected is often itself an anticipation of death, allowing the "signs and tokens" of mortality to be avoided. In the poem of that title, it is the death of a widow's husband that allows her to cry:

> "For what, what can touch
> One whom, riven of all
> That makes life gay,
> No hints can appal
> Of more takings away!" (PW II 277)

-- and this she says in the face of ominous threats of further doom. But for Hardy the problem of hope and disappointment was not so easily solved: there were "throbbings of noontide," as he put it, throughout his later life. Minimalism acts as a cover from which the poet can make raids on the imaginative territory of Romanticism; or, to shift the metaphor, his "death" provides a basis for moments of revivification in which the story of experience is supplemented. In poems like "'For Life I had never cared greatly'" he insists that it is life which demanded poetry from him, even after he had lowered his expectations to a minimum: "With symphonies soft and sweet colour / It courted me then, / Till evasions seemed wrong" (PW II 288). In a free imitation of the chorus from Oedipus at Colonos, Hardy had characterized old age as clouded, a place "Where sunshine bird and bloom frequent no more, / And cowls of cloud wrap the stars' radiancy" (PW III 307). Here, Life calls him to song, and his eventual vision of "a

star, / Uncloaked . . . burning from pole to horizon" is protected from failure by the fact that the poet has already determinedly willed his own failure, only to be "re-illumed" later.[1] A similar supposition is the basis of the important late poem "He Never Expected Much," where "hints" of greater things (Hardy's equivalent of Wordsworth's "gleams") become the "neutral-tinted haps and such" which the world had always promised to the child. As in earlier poem, it is the "mysterious voice" of the world which inspires the poet. Voice, in Hardy, usually indicates moments of unusual imaginative influx, and almost always, the revivification of a world, a memory, or even a grave which has previously rested inert and dead. The world must be lost before it can be obliquely re-examined.

One rather macabre metaphor for the relationship with his own life which Hardy establishes within such an aesthetics of "revivification" is that of parasitism. Hardy often referred to thought as "parasitic" on biological existence; and he excerpted a remarkable passage on parasitism into his notebook from J.G. Wood's Insects as Home (1872) -- particularly interesting if one recalls his 1888 diary note on the writer's interest in the progress of his or her career: "A naturalist's interests in the hatching of a queer egg or germ is the utmost introspective consideration you should allow yourself" (EL 267). Wood writes of the Ichneumon Fly, which lays its eggs inside the body of a live caterpillar:

> Just in proportion as the fat [of the caterpillar] decreases, the Ichneumon larvae increase, so that the eye of the caterpillar looks quite plump and healthy, when it is in reality absolutely emaciated.[2]

1. Richardson, p. 104, usefully remarks of Hardy that "vision returns . . . through the back door, and though Hardy does not believe in it, it believes in him." On Hardy's Oedipus poem, see Jeremy V. Steele, "'Thoughts from Sophocles': Hardy in the '90s," in Clements and Grindle (eds.), pp. 69-82.
2. I quote Wood from Björk's earlier edition of The Literary Notes of Thomas Hardy (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1974), p. 326. Hardy's summary of the passage is entry 318 in both this and the completed two-volume edition cited above, though Bjork drops the quote from Wood in the latter. Cf. entry 328, which refers to the prolongation of insects' lives in captivity.

The paradox of memory's dependence on a vanished life, the death of one "self" and the life of another, is suggested; as well as the nourishment on hidden sources which characterized Hardy's existence after he retired behind the Max Gate hedges. The career of the writer is founded on death.

If Hardy's late life is a supplement, a survival beyond catastrophe, then his understanding of his life is also in a sense "supplementary"; it comes at a point after the text of his life has been written, and is a commentary on that text. In Hardy's case this awareness is informed, I believe, by a parallel with the biblical pattern of text and its fulfillment, though in Hardy's case modified by his loss of faith and consequent despairing distance from the full presence of God in the Bible. There are a number of poems on what could be called the typology of self-understanding. Typically, memory discovers in the past a pattern of repetitions which only become meaningful when it is too late. The pattern is constituted by memory, the moment of belated understanding inevitably linked to a history of misunderstanding.[1] A perfect example of this is "Quid Hic Agis," published in 1916, a poem in which Hardy meditates on his repeated hearing of a lesson from I Kings 19 -- one of the most heavily annotated passages in his Bible.[2] The passage itself deals with what I have called supplementarity. Elijah mopes in the wilderness, and the Lord passes by, though curiously, the Lord is not where he might have been thought to be: "and a great and strong wind rent the mountains. . . . but the LORD was not in the wind. . . . And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." The "still small voice" was one which Hardy seems to have associated throughout his life with the aftermath of passionate

1. See Taylor, pp. xi-xiii; and Davis, pp. 390-99.
2. See Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 50; and the (incomplete) list in Kenneth Phelps, Annotations by Thomas Hardy in his Bibles and Prayer-Book, Monographs on the Life, Times, and Works of Thomas Hardy, No. 32 (St. Peter Port, Guernsey: Toucan Press, 1966), pp. 1-2, 5.

events; we could even link it to the voice from the "traces from an old fire" in the epigraph to the "Poems of 1912-13" or to the voice from the fire in "Surview."[1] In "Quid Hic Agis" the narrator's life is divided into three phases. In his youth he is too busy wooing to see

> That this tale of a seer
> Which came once a year
> Might, when sands were heaping,
> Be like a sweat creeping,
> Or in any degree
> Bear on her or on me! (PW II 175)

In his maturity, he reads the lesson aloud from the lectern, but still does not understand. In a final period his understanding and identification with the prophet in his despair is complete. He neither listens nor reads but <u>feels</u> "the shake / Of wind and earthquake / And consuming fire." Understanding has been achieved through a tremendous loss -- that of his wife -- leaving him "spiritless in the wilderness" (a wilderness partly linked; the poem's end-note "During the War" suggests, to the historical moment). Like Elijah, the old poet desiring death is condemned to live on, himself a "still small voice" like that which asks the question which is the poem's title. His understanding is itself a part of that process which the biblical passage describes: the emergence of voice from the fire. It is important that the message has always been with him, its unfolding becoming the dynamic of his life in a way which parallels the biblical pattern of typological anticipation and fulfillment -- though in Hardy's case the "fulfillment" is an awareness of failure.[2]

1. Phelps, p. 1, links early annotations to Hardy's romance with Louisa Harding.
2. Hardy's reading, annotation, and re-reading of his Bible throughout his life (with a gap in the annotations 1872-97) reinforces this parallel. However the expectation of a <u>plenum</u> in the fully-revealed text is absent in Hardy: the author of the work is fate, and understanding brings no "second chance." On the revival of typological interpretation in the early nineteenth century, and its influence in Victorian literature, see George P. Landow, <u>Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art and Thought</u> (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). On the more general question of interpretation and typology, see Kermode, <u>The Genesis of Secrecy</u>, p. 82 et passim.

Retroactive meaning is used similarly as a measure for, and re-enactment of, the poet's loss in a later poem, "The Prophetess." It describes an episode in which the narrator's mistress sings him a song called "The Mocking Bird"; a song which, though he did not realize it, prophesied the course of their lives together. Nothing in the original circumstances told him that "the words bore / A meaning more / Than that they were a ditty of the time." It is, however, only in "time" that their significance is apparent:

> But after years
> Of hopes and fears,
> And all they bring, and all they take away,
> I found I had heard
> The Mocking-bird
> In person singing there to me that day. (PW III 170)

What was previously just a song has become a "type," fulfilled in the life of the narrator. He finds that he has unwittingly been acting out a pre-arranged drama -- a fact once again only discoverable as a supplementary awareness which is imposed on the "story."[1] The "late" work for Hardy thus involves the writer in a retrospective vision in which the meaning of a pattern can surface, but only when it is <u>too</u> late. Understanding is achieved only at the cost of the death of an earlier innocent self, or the beloved's.

The poems which Hardy wrote after 1912 dwell on the idea of an "ending" in this peculiar sense. "Self-Unconscious" (to borrow one of the titles), he suddenly awakes to conclusions like "My right mind woke, and I stood dumb; / Forty years' frost and flower / Had fleeted" (PW II 286); or "It seemed a thing for weeping / To find, at slumber's wane / And morning's sly increeping, / That Now, not Then, held reign" (PW II 425). Dennis Taylor attempts to locate such poems in the period from

1. In a parallel fashion, Davis argues that "after writing the tragic novels Hardy became in his life and work almost an image of <u>them</u>" (p. 376).

1913 to about 1922, but this precision is contradicted, not only by the presence of such poems in Hardy's last volume (some examples of which I discussed earlier), but also by a sense that such "plotting" is present throughout Hardy's career.[1] One indicator of this repetition is the quotation from Hebrews 12 which was often used in Victorian defenses of reformism in religion, and which Hardy places in the mouth of Angel Clare in his argument with his father in chapter 18 of Tess of the D'Urbervilles:

> My whole instinct in matters of religion is towards reconstruction; to quote your favourite epistle to the Hebrews, "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."[2]

The emphasis of the original text -- which is itself a quotation from an Old Testament text -- is, however, slightly different. It begins "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made. . . ." It emphasizes, that is, God's continual shaking of his creation rather than any final state of equilibrium. Unsurprisingly, Hardy used it again. In 1915 when he was asked to contribute to a symposium on "The War and Literature," he replied to his questioner that the results of the war would be "Ultimately good; by 'removing (from literature) those things that are shaken, as things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.'"[3] The war, that is, represented a further blow to his faith in mankind, or even, as he said, in an Immanent Will of the kind he had pictured in The Dynasts. And he used the same passage once again in "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922), seeking evidence of a progressive movement to the Church -- though even this did not produce

1. Taylor, ch. 3.
2. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, ed. P.N. Furbank (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 128.
3. Personal Writings, p. 247.

the demythologized services he hoped for, and he added a footnote to the later Wessex Edition printing pointing out that his hopes had been "too sanguine." The "earthquake and fire" of "Quid Hic Agis," like the "throbbings of noontide" of an earlier poem, thus signifies a crisis which constantly shakes his literature, "yet once more" producing the still small voice of understanding.

Finally, the "supplementary" or after-written can also, more tentatively, be seen as an element of Hardy's late style, particularly in his prosody and titles. The supplementary title is a device he often uses as a kind of defense, a let-out like that in the poems which he assigns a secondary status, affixing "Song" or "From an Old Draft," or "To an old air," as if they cannot be fully described by the words of the title. In the same way the poems are second thoughts on their subjects, qualifications of the real Emma or Mary, and at best traces of their presence. In other poems, Hardy picks up traces of earlier thought, suggestion the incompletion of any poem as a container for consciousness. One poem is even entitled "'So, Time' / (The same thought resumed)" (PW III 72), reproducing the idea of Hardy's own "time" as a constant supplementarity, a meditation which exceeds its own forms as the poet writes on.

A similar analysis might even be applied to the syntax of Hardy's poetry (though a full examination of the question is beyond the scope of this work).[1] There is a typical stanza-form which is more common in the late verse in which a description is followed by a late comment or action. Two examples are "Snow in the Suburbs," and (even more graphic

1. A recent attempt to apply this type of analysis to Yeats's poetry is Joseph Adams's Yeats and the Masks of Syntax (London: Macmillan, 1984); though Adams makes little attempt to link his stylistic analysis to anything other than the "anti-Platonism" which he associates with Modernism.

in terms of its punctuation, ending, and comment) "Tragedian to Tragedienne":

> The steps are a blanched slope,
> Up which, with feeble hope,
> A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
> And we take him in. (PW III 43)

> Last, you will flag, and finish
> Your masquings too:
> Yes: end them: I not there to succour you. (PW III 149)

The action (or inaction) which completes each stanza in the subordinate clause comes after the event, and disturbs any sense of a seamless description or evocation of a mood: often we are referred outside the poem to an unavailable world in which the writer lives. The cat disappears, the action ceases. In a pattern which is particularly common in Hardy's verse, an apparent closure -- particularly where the poet has been reciting or narrating -- is disturbed by a final comment, line of verse, or intruding event which means that the reader must turn and reflect on what has come before, once again questioning the ability of the poem to "contain" the experience of life.

A final example of supplementarity in style can be seen in Hardy's use of repetition of a refrain (a favourite device[1]) for example as he modified it in "He Never Expected Much," the poem he wrote to celebrate his eighty-sixth birthday. Here, the circle of prophecy and eventual fulfillment is closed, as is fitting in a poem which seeks to sum up Hardy's minimalism. The refrain acts as an echo, a confirmation of nature's presence as a trace, a secret voice across the poet's whole life. Life, in this poem, is itself a ghostly echo:

> 'Twas then you said, and since have said,
> Times since have said,
> In that mysterious voice you shed
> From clouds and hills around:

1. Taylor, pp. 37-38, points out that the refrain in poems like "During Wind and Rain" is used to connect Hardy's reverie and the present moment: it pulls the reader into the present moment.

"Many have loved me desperately,
Many with smooth serenity,
While some have shown contempt of me
Till they have dropped underground.

"I do not promise overmuch,
Child; overmuch;
Just neutral-tinted haps and such,"
You said to minds like mine. (PW III 225)

The poem's full title, "He Never Expected Much / [or] / A Consideration / [A reflection] on My Eighty-Sixth Birthday," is itself an extended supplementing of something already in the third person, a meditation of the life of "him," Thomas Hardy, a "reflection" of that life, which is finally "my" life, understood as a pattern at last fulfilled.

2.2.2 The Poet Among the Dead

Hardy's interest in death is visible from his early years, and the habit of attention to death and its forms remained always with, both in terms of his punctiliousness about mourning and commemoration, and his continuing fascination with "graveyard" subjects. In his poetry, death is, in one form or another, perhaps the most common topic. The ghost-haunted after-life described in "'I was the midmost'" was characterized by an even closer relationship with the dead, for if Hardy is a remnant of his own former life then the dead are both the materials of his poems (their true natures invisible to others) and, in one sense, also the audience of his poems. There is discernible within his late works a dialogue with the dead which illustrates many of the same difficulties over authority and preservation which we see in Hardy's treatment of his own relationship to posterity.

Emma Hardy's death in November 1912 inspired a flood of poems in which she "opens the door of the Past" to him (PW III 91). In the "Poems

of 1912-13" Hardy wrote what is often said to be one of the greatest elegiac sequences in the English language; a sequence in which he converts Emma into the source of his creative energy. The "Poems of 1912-13" as they were originally published represent a quest for a dead Emma, paralleling the real trip to Cornwall which Hardy made in March 1913 in order to relive his memories. They seek a dialogue which is never quite achieved: the two lovers do not speak to each other, though the possibility that Emma's memory is eternally present is suggested -- just as in a much late "The Absolute Explains," Hardy asserts that "All things are shaped to be / Eternally" (PW III 69).[1]

Throughout the sequence, there is a complex interplay of voice and script; of an Emma Hardy who speaks or can be reanimated, and one who is more like a text. In the first poem of the sequence, Hardy chastises Emma for not speaking before she went: "Never to bid goodbye / Or lip me the softest call" (PW II 47). In the second poem Hardy says to her that he failed to "read the writing on your face" and it is her distance from him that is emphasized in the poem's concluding lines. The same alternation of a desired but absent voice and a voice and a script which must be remembered or recovered is apparent through the rest of the sequence. Where Hardy "finds" her, it is in tracing her presence in the landscape of Cornwall, or in memory alone. Even in the poem in which she "calls" to him, "The Voice," the question is equivocal: as H.C. Weatherby points out, Hardy uses a biblical text in expressing his simultaneous doubt and desire to believe. The voice may be "only the breeze, in its listlessness / Travelling across the wet mead" (PW II 56).[2]

1. For a discussion of Hardy's equivocation on this question, see Peter Robson, "In Another's Words: Thomas Hardy's Poetry," English, 31 (1982), 221-46.
2. H.C. Weatherby, "Of Water and the Spirit: Hardy's 'The Voice,'" SR, 19 (1983), 302-08. The reference is to John 3: 5-8. On Hardy's doubt, see also Ross C. Murfin, "Moments of Vision: Hardy's 'Poems of 1912-13,'" VP, 20 (1982), 73-84.

The only way in which this problem of commemoration can be solved, and Emma given a voice, is through an imaginary drama in which Hardy reanimates her in a version of prosopopeia. The progress towards this, in which Hardy first speculates what she might say or do, and then finally speaks in her voice (in "The Haunter"), is fascinating. And even in the most affirmative poems like "At Castle Boterel" and "The Phantom Horsewoman," there is a moment of doubt: the latter poem includes a stanza in which Emma voices the world's opinion of Hardy's imaginings, and between these two poems is "After a Journey," in which Emma is described as a "voiceless ghost" and a "thin ghost." In "At Castle Boterel" he farewells the landscape of love (though, inevitably, he will return); and at the end of "The Phantom Horsewoman," in the stanza which originally ended the sequence, he withdraws the voice from her (retreating into the third person) even while affirming that "she rides gaily / In his rapt thought . . . as when first eyed" (PW II 66).

This intensity of visual memory cannot be sustained. In the 1919 Collected Poems Hardy added three poems, originally placed earlier in Satires of Circumstance, to the sequence. To the qualified Platonism of the original group is added the almost cynical realism of "St. Launce's Revisited" ("Why waste thought, / When I know them vanished / Under earth" [PW II 69]), the more allegorical treatment of grief and guilt in "The Spell of the Rose," and the absolute flatness of "Where the Picnic Was," in which Hardy fails to read any sign of Emma written in the landscape. Donald Davie has argued that Hardy retreats from his idealism here, psychologizing his own metaphysical insights.[1] In fact, the "retreat" which Davie sees is an inevitable product of the realisation that Hardy has achieved all he can in the sequence: that "sweet

1. Davie, "Hardy's Virgilian Purples," pp. 153-56.

reverberances are all time leaves to me," as one of the poems written in this period but published later concludes (PW II 192).

The end of the sequence of 1912-13 thus, inevitably, modifies Hardy's original feelings. He provides in "The Spell of the Rose" an overall metaphor for his belated worship of Emma's ghost: the "perspectivizing" which Harold Bloom associates with a writer's "askesis" or late solipsism.[1] Within the sequence as whole there is a movement from intense loss and desire for a voice to Hardy's speaking <u>for</u> Emma, using her as a kind of puppet; and from there to a more commemorative attitude in which Hardy reads her presence; and finally a more distant stage of grief in which the poet meditates on his losses and their meaning for his art, while subject to a more diffuse and more open memory ("open" in the sense, also, that he may do what he wants with the dead). Something like the same itinerary is detectable in Hardy's treatment of Emma in subsequent volumes. In <u>Moments of Vision</u> (1917) there are fewer poems than one might have expected on Emma (considering the flood of verse from 1912-13). A number of them, like "First Sight of Her and After," dwell upon the place of Hardy's loss in the larger pattern -- adjusting his private feelings to the world, or lamenting the belatedness of understanding. In others, memory is a puzzle: in "The Riddle" Hardy seems to be converting Emma's resting-place into an ironic knot. In poems like "'I thought, my Heart,'" "The Shadow on the Stone," and "He Prefers Her Earthly," Hardy's mood contrasts with Davie's claims: in the first he is surprised by a resurgence of feeling; in the second he refuses to turn and disconfirm his illusion of her presence (the poem is, Stan Smith points out, Orphic[2]), and in the last he prefers earthly memory to the thought of her in any heavenly "glory-show" (PW II 240).

1. Bloom, <u>The Anxiety of Influence</u>, ch. 5; <u>A Map of Misreading</u>, ch. 5.
2. Stan Smith, <u>Inviolable Voice: History and Twentieth Century Poetry</u> (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Humanities Press, 1982), p. 30.

In Moments of Vision Hardy also extends his use of memory, writing of his earlier romances in poems like "On a Heath"; and in poems like "Quid Hic Agis?" and "The Five Students" he begins to write in an autobiographical mode which covers the entire span of his life. In a few poems in the 1917 volume, Hardy once again takes on Emma's voice, speaking as her: this is the case for "I travel as a phantom now" and (possibly) for "His Heart."[1] Finally, in other poems Hardy is glad to see memory fade, suggesting that he has been hurt enough.

Moments of Vision thus presents a range of possibilities in its treatment of the first Mrs. Hardy. Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) also has a large number of poems on Emma, but the emphasis is very different. Rather than hearing her echo or feeling her presence, Hardy sets out to commemorate or recuperate: he must actively seek the dead or reinscribe their presence in natural objects. In poems like "Read by Moonlight" and "Lonely Days" Hardy reads Emma's old scripts ("Versified from a Diary" appears as a sub-title); and in "The Marble Tablet" and "The Lament of the Looking Glass" he seeks -- and fails to find -- Emma's presence in objects.[2] The volume is full of poems in which "a harsh change comes edging in / As no such scene were there" (PW II 427). Reality intrudes on the attempts to "revision" the past, even in Cornwall:

> Where the ocean had sprayed our banquet
> I stood, to recall it as then:
> The same eluding again!
> No vision. (PW II 417)

It is though Hardy tracks himself as he depicts himself doing in "He Follows Himself," reminding his dreaming past-obsessed "Heart" or emotional self that the objects of his affections are dead. He also, in other poems, suggests the impossibility of any outsider interpreting

1. Gittings, in The Older Hardy, p. 157, points out that Hardy had begun to write such poems as early as the second half of 1913.
2. The former is, however, dated 1916, and refers to the memorial which Hardy had erected in the church at St. Juliot.

Emma's "truth." He uses epigraphs which doubly reinforce this point with their use of Greek and Latin: "Secretum meum mihi," " Ἄτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα " (which things are an allegory); the latter in a poem which could be called an anatomy of memory, "The Chosen." It depicts a lover who creates in the last of his loves a compound spirit whose memory he reveres. The vocabulary is typical of Hardy's later poems: he "traces," "scans," "tends," while the woman "swerves," "turns," "lies," and seems to almost avoid him; and then he "atones" rather than being "passion-moved" (PW II 458-60).

In the poems on Emma in Human Shows (1925) memory is even more attenuated. In one, "Come Not; Yet Come!," he calls her back to be his muse, but this is a process which arouses mixed feelings -- and requires an incantation. In other poems the impulse is purely commemorative, as titles like "Ten Years Since" and "The Month's Calender" suggest. Memory is generalized: there are a number of poems on former loves, and a democracy of memory suggested by his poem on Louisa Harding:

> I am forgetting Louie the buoyant;
> Why not raise her phantom, too,
> Here in daylight
> With the elect one's? (PW III 90)

In other poems, like "Before my Friend Arrived" (which recalls his drawing Horace Moule's burial mound) he discusses the abstract principles which inform commemorative verse (I will examine this question later). His memory may fail ("Can it be so? It must be so, / That visions have not ceased to be / In this the chiefest sanctuary / Of her whose form we used to know" [PW III 131]), but again Hardy often places himself inside the dead, or adopts a curiously intimate tone with them. A picture of his mind in this period is, once again, provided by "In a Former Resort after Many Years." His mind is:

as a gallery portrait-lined,
And scored with necrologic scrawls,
Where feeble voices rise, once full-defined,
From underground in curious calls?

He is kind of living tombstone, whose calm is disturbed by the faint voice of memory. The voices are "curious" perhaps in a sense closer to the root meaning of the word in the Latin: Hardy must <u>care</u> for the dead. Writing of Stevens' "cure beyond forgetfulness" in "The Rock," J. Hillis Miller points out that the word "scour" (which Stevens also uses) has the same root as "care," and is related to words like "crisis," "critic," and "script."[1] Hardy's mind is "scored" by the voices of the dead, and one can suggest that they are what write Hardy and constitute the crisis that has separated him from the world of the unmarked. They are his source of inspiration, as well as his poetic burden. Such etymologizing is of allusive value at best (and at worst misleading), but the vocabulary of "script," "lines," etc. is often invoked in Hardy's late description of the dead, and an absolute division enforced between the outer world and the inner one in which value is located.

<u>Winter Words</u> (1928) contains few poems that can be plausibly seen as referring to Emma, and most are distanced by some device or other. "He Did Not Know Me" is subtitled "Woman's Sorrow Song," emphasizing its generic nature; "That Kiss in the Dark" and other poems present fragments of memory without context, as if they were fragments off Hardy's gravestone; "The Destined Pair" abstractly and without pain considers whether "two beings" might have been better not meeting. The poem in which other dead friends are described are similarly uninvolved. "After the Death of a Friend" simply considers Hardy's reaction, ignoring the deceased and meditating on death as the "Inexorable, insatiate one!" (PW III 196). Hardy's own death enters into a number of the poems which

1. J. Hillis Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," <u>GaR</u>, 30 (1967), 10-11.

he writes on the subject: into "Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to the Household," into the poem on Horace Moule, and poems like "To Louisa in the Lane" in which he remembers the dead lead directly to the thought that he is soon to follow. There are a number of poems in this volume which deal with memorials or graveyards, and those that do often refer to the perishability of memory. "Love Watches a Window" we have already examined; a similarly skeptical conclusion is drawn from "A Winsome Woman":

> she, too, will pass
> From the sun and the air
> To her cave under grass;
> And the world will declare,
> "No such woman as his passioned utterances show
> Walked this planet, we trow!" (PW III 268-69)

A final comment can be provided by the third-to-last poem of the volume, dated "1905 and 1926." If Hardy elevates his dead to a pantheon, then he celebrates the fall of all idols in "Christmas in the Elgin Room," evoking the sadness of abandonment. Eventually, all are exiled to the museum of history, the marble monuments disconnected from the life of their times, "brought to the gloom / Of this gaunt room / Which sunlight shuns, and sweet Aurore but enters cold" (PW III 272). But Aurore had always been Hardy's goddess, guarding the silence of his study.

There is thus a change in Hardy's treatment of both his wife's memory and the other dead through the period from 1912 to his final volume. The dead become more distant and generalized (especially in the final volume) and their treatment more abstract.[1] In Winter Words they become to some extent incorporated into Hardy's death. At this point, however, I would like to return to the beginnings of this "ghost-haunted" period in order to examine specific problems which result from his usage

1. This argument is the opposite to that of Richardson, p. 27, who insists that "In Hardy's poetry, the dead represent a seemingly irredeemable pastness, a complete absence of possibility. . . . their disappearance is seen as a threat to the living."

of Emma and others as his subject matter.

The dead are like the other contents of memory; they are not merely passive, but instead are taken up, like the early experiences which Freud describes, into our psyches, where they are subject to all the psychic mechanisms which Freud identifies: displacement, repression, sublimation, and so on. This is especially so for Hardy, whose relationship with his own past was so intense. Accordingly, there are a number of problems associated with Hardy's treatment of the dead in his late works, and a number of poems which suggest the difficulty of dealing with the dead, or seeking to reinscribe their presence, or to give them a ghostly "after-life." One example is "The Obliterate Tomb," one of the "Miscellaneous Pieces" in Satires of Circumstance. A "man of memories" returns to his home-town and attempts to forget an old inter-family enmity by reinscribing the fading names on the tomb of his old enemies, who have "all shrunk away into the silence / Like a lost song" (PW II 101). When he goes to do so, he is confronted by a "stranger" who is a distant relative of the dead, and who claims the right to reinscribe the names himself. The "man of memories" is haunted by his guilt, and even though he finds that the stranger had failed to re-carve the names, he cannot bring himself to attempt to do so again. He dies, and the tomb-stones are eventually used to pave the churchyard path. A simple tale, but what is at stake is a version of Hardy's own perpetuation of the names of those who have died (including Emma, from whom he had become estranged). The freedom of the living to write of the dead is disturbed by guilt (the narrator eventually admits that the "stranger" may have been a figment of his imagination). Survival in this poem is literary survival: the vanishing family are a "luminous line" who fade "like a lost song," the lines are their "chronicle," and they look to a future

"sage" who will be able to interpret their fading inscription.

In such ways, a number of Hardy's late poems deal explicitly or implicitly with the problems of commemoration, the fascination and difficulties of taking the dead as subject-matter. The sense in which his poems are remnants of dead passion, or a passion engendered by death, is suggested by a poem from Satires of Circumstance, "The Workbox." It tells the story of a joiner who presents his wife, who is from another town and of "borough folk," with a sewing box made from a scantling from the coffin of one John Wayward, "who / Died of they knew not what." The carpenter feels free to meditate on the varied use of materials:

> And while I worked it made me think
> Of timber's varied doom;
> One inch where people eat and drink,
> The next inch in a tomb. (PW II 118)

His wife is affected powerfully by the tale, since the dead man was from her town and (we are to understand) seems to have died of love for her. Yet she has already committed herself to living with the box "all [her] sewing years" and can only deny that "mere accidental things" like its having been the offcut of a coffin have any effect on her. The story, simple in itself and typical of Hardy in its rather Gothic plot of what R.P. Blackmur calls "crossed fidelities," can be read in a number of ways in the context of Hardy's mode of imaginative recuperation.[1] If we see language as a medium which, like wood, can be used for everyday use one moment, and to contain the dead the next (in an epitaph, say) then the poem becomes an excellent metaphor for his relationship with the dead: poems are the "left over" emotional material of dead affections, and the materials of their construction are imbued with death itself, with the shadow of an emotion which they cannot fully contain and which cannot be separated from the use of language in any situation. The "shingled

1. R.P. Blackmur, "The Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy," in Language as Gesture, p. 55.

pattern" of the box contains the trace of death, yet it cannot tell that which it is, a token of (betrayed?) love reaching beyond the grave, a visible echo. On a more rhetorical level, the "pattern" -- that is what a scantling is -- has failed to "fit" that for which it is made; there is an excess of materials, an excess in language if we pursue the analogy, which generates guilt because it says more than the occasion strictly demands.

In the way that the dead form so much of the substance of Hardy's poetry there is not only a sense of usage. He often altered the details of what he described. The best-known examples are his slanting of details in his poetic account of his wife's last days to imply that he was unaware of her serious illness (though this is perhaps problematic[1]) and the way in which he treated this and various aspects of his background in his autobiography, concealing those aspects of his early life he considered too lowly. Concealment of the true facts in Hardy's Life did little real harm, unlike the rather macabre story told in his late poem "The Single Witness," in which a reputation is protected by the extreme expedient of killing the only witness of an adultery with that Freudian weapon, the "father's sword" (PW III 257). But it could "kill" in a sense, for Hardy's rewriting and burning destroyed a fair amount of the fabric of the past, involving what must have been dangerously close to conscious forgetting. Something of the pain of this process in conveyed by poems like "The Photograph," which describes him watching a photograph burning in the fire. Here, even where the subject is half-forgotten, to destroy a trace of her can arouse distress: "the deed that had nigh drawn tears / Was done in a casual clearance of life's arrears; / But I felt as if I had put her to death that night!" (PW II

1. Gittings, The Older Hardy pp. 178-84. Millgate's version, pp. 467, 480-83, is more generous, and probably fairer. See also Taylor, p. 162, fn. 29, for a sensitive discussion of Hardy's supposed "insincerity."

208). This poem was published in 1917 (though the incident which it describes probably took place much earlier).[1] The next few years at Max Gate must have seen a number of similar scenes as Hardy sifted through his papers while writing his autobiography.

A context for such alterations is provided by Hardy's 1906 paper "Memories of Church Restoration." Hardy argues that an architect surveying a decaying church is faced with a conflict between two opposing impulses: the "aesthetic," which sees the form as the essence, and the associative, which sees the human value of the original, decaying substance. It could be said of the dead that Hardy risked contradicting his own aesthetic, re-forming their lives rather than conserving the substance as he made them into the source of art, and sacrificing what he called the "spiritual attribute" of "human associations."[2] Moreover, the opposition of aesthetic purpose and conservation is in part the inevitable result of attempting to conserve any associative structure, and in a sense the more important question is: what is the motive of the artist in re-moulding the substance of human lives? Does he do it because to recast and reform into a well-constructed shape is the only way of preserving the memories of the dead; or does he use them as the materials of his own monument, taking whatever makes for a lasting image? The debate between literary and literal values is an important aspect of Hardy's work.[3]

1. Bailey, pp. 371-72, suggests that the photograph was Tryphena Sparks's, destroyed between 1884 and 1890.
2. Personal Writings, pp. 214-15. See also D. Drew Cox, "Hardy and the Architect," Agenda, 10, Nos. 2-3 (1972), 50-65. Cox concludes that Hardy's writing enabled him to resolve the architectural tension; I would suggest that it is present within his works.
3. It is interesting in this context that a recent work has argued that Hardy's depiction of rural Dorset was not as "conservationist" and sociologically accurate as writers like Raymond Williams have suggested. See K.D.M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Snell argues that Hardy retained a distance from his subjects typical of the metropolitan intellectual, and that he often altered fact to fit the fictional world.

If we use the idea of "materials" which is suggested by the 1906 essay and poems like "The Workbox," then Hardy's "fitting" of the dead into the mould of his verse recalls the pattern of his late novels. In Tess the characters are constantly frozen into monumental positions: Alec's recumbent position on the family tomb in particular, and the earlier episode in which the sleep-walking Angel lays Tess on an ancient stone coffin, suggest the way in which the novel's characters are "locked in" to a prefigured pattern. Little Father Time, himself a kind of living epitaph or tombstone, suggests a similar fixity, as do a number of poems. One of the most compelling is "The Catching Ballet of the Wedding Clothes," the story of a bride who is courted by a "rich gentlemen" but marries a poor man, using the wedding clothes given to her by the wealthy suitor. She is haunted by his "figure" in her dreams, and finally concludes that the outer form determines the state of being:

> She then wrote to Jack thus:
> "I'm torn with mind-strife:
> She who wears a man's bride-clothes
> Must be the man's wife!" (PW III 267)

Surprisingly, she has little trouble convincing "the parish / (Save parson and clerk)" that this is true. A similar acquiescence is shown in "At Wynyard's Gap," where a chance encounter at a lonely inn frequented by lovers causes two people to almost accept that they will live out the idea: "since we've got so far, / And what we've acted feel we almost are!" (PW III 63). Hardy's characters often succumb to a similar sense of powerlessness.

A parallel can, I think, be drawn between this aspect of Hardy's determinism and the question of fidelity and usage which I raised earlier. The position of such characters is like that of Hardy's dead, trapped within his "bride-clothes." In his treatment of them he often

stands in the stead of "Necessity." He is their fate, and the forms of his verse often serve as a "mould" for inevitability, the co-incidence of words rhyming, for example, dictating the pattern of events.[1] It is therefore not surprising that there should be in the poetry something like the "return of the repressed" which Perry Meisel sees in Hardy's late novels. Hardy restores and reforms the lives of the dead. Yet the past resists the transformation, even as it is altered by the poet's activities, and Hardy is often molested by the shadowy presence of the dead. This is especially so for the period after the "Poems of 1912-13," in which Hardy's sense of doubt at his own commemorative processes seems to be most evident, but is true even of earlier volumes. The "tide of visions" which Hardy invokes in "In Front of the Landscape" include those dead who are "Rigid in hate, / Smitten by years-long wryness born of misprision" (PW II 8). As he acknowledges, the writing of the dead involves a "fuller translation than rested upon them / As living kind." They have been mistreated in life, but there is every chance that death will involve a further distortion.

A similar sense of misprision is suggested by a number of later poems, including some which I have already examined: "The Obliterate Tomb," for example, in which there is a good deal of guilt attached to commemoration. In "The Monument-maker," published in Human Shows, the title figure is again akin to Hardy, a mason who chisels a monument to his departed only to have her shade mock him for inaccuracy and for a failure to love in life:

> Then laughed she over my shoulder as in our Maytime:
> "It spells me not!" she said:
> "Tells nothing about my beauty, wit, or gay time
> With all those, quick and dead,

1. For an excellent discussion of "form as fate" in Hardy's verse, see Margaret Mahar, "Hardy's Poetry of Renunciation," ELH, 45 (1978), 303-24.

Of high or lowlihead,
That hovered near,
Including you, who carve there your devotion;
But you felt none, my dear!" (PW III 14)

The monument builder attempts to disown this implicit guilt by ascribing it to a wrong judgement on the part of his beloved, but his argument is undermined by the fact that the accusation comes from within his memory. There may be literal accusations left by a departed spouse (such as Emma's diaries) but the troublings about accuracy in this poem come from a deeper knowledge that the loss of the dead and any wrongs done to them cannot be expiated, and perhaps even from a knowledge that the poem is deeply involved in death. It both requires the dead as object, and seeks to inscribe (or ascribe) words to that object, even to provide an imitation of the dead, a re-vivified image. In Hardy's late work, the latter project is often threatened as the voice of the dead breaks through within the poem's presentation of them.

The positive effects of such a connection between guilt and writings are described in another poem from Human Shows. "Every Artemisia" concerns the plight of a monument-maker who is condemned by her scorning of her suitor to "build, to ease / [her] scalding fires, / A temple" in his memory (PW III 32). She is like Hardy in that another, intervening voice accuses her of speaking from "within a tomb," and having a "monstrous gloom." Trapped as she is by the imperatives of memory and guilt, her fixation has its gains. From being "cool amd keen, / Whiling away / Time" she has become energized, her "tepidity" displaced by feverishness and a desire to build a "temple topping the Deities'!" The indifferent lover has become a poet, in competition with her ancestors in eulogy, and at odds with those around her in her pursuit of posterity and the obsessive guilt which motivates it.

In such poems, the problems associated with the use of memory seem less personal, and indeed, after a period of apparent guilt up to about 1922, Hardy seems to have been more relaxed in his treatment of the dead, as I have suggested. There is, in the very late poems, almost a polymorphous perversity in the way Hardy uses the dead as fertile ground for his art; as if they had no real existence outside the life of memory. At times, they seem to have become a part of an internalized sexual life. Such an undercurrent can be seen, for example, in "The Photograph":

> Then I vented a cry of hurt, and averted my eyes;
> The spectacle was one that I could not bear,
> To my deep and sad surprise;
> But compelled to heed, I looked again furtivewise
> Till the flame had eaten her breasts, and mouth, and hair.

Hardy's treatment of the dead reveals what Philip Larkin has called "an undercurrent of sensual cruelty in his writing," a relish at their availability to memory.[1] At its most morbid it could even be traced to the hanging of a woman which Hardy witnessed in 1856 -- an event which, Gittings suggests, may be the source of some aspects of Hardy's association of death and desire.[2] There is often another element in this relish -- a pleasure at his own survival which may be independent of his attitude to the dead. In "'Not only I,'" a poem implicitly directed at Emma, he pursues her shade with the idea that all her thoughts and passions have vanished with her. The poem is supposedly about the absolute nature of death, but its compressed form and tone, and the

1. Philip Larkin, "Wanted: Good Hardy Critic," CQ, 8 (1966), 176-77. The most horrible "sex and death" poem in Hardy's late work is the dramatic interlude "Aristodemus the Messenian," with its bloody womb-ripping (PW III 181-86).
2. Young Thomas Hardy, pp. 32-34. On this preoccupation with dead women in his old age, see Gittings, The Older Hardy, pp. 158, 205.
3. To this could be added the list of poems in which "the mood of remorse seems to have been quite artificially stimulated" which Millgate supplies, p. 489; in particular "The Sound of Her," a poem about the sound of Emma's coffin lid being screwed down (PW III 304).

vocabulary ("Bin," "moulder") pushes the point a little too far home, so that the reader is left with a lingering uneasiness over whether Hardy is in fact lamenting the passing of life or celebrating the secretive power of death to distance and conceal. Death as a state seems the unwritten poem, or a skeletal freedom for the world to flesh out the bones, as (despite its content) the over-flowing final line following the compression of the poem's middle section suggests:

> Compressed here in six feet by two,
> In secrecy
> To lie with me
> Till the Call shall be,
> Are all these things I knew,
> Which cannot be handed on;
> Strange happenings quite unrecorded,
> Lost to the world and disregarded,
> That only thinks: "Here moulders till Doom's-dawn
> A woman's skeleton." (PW III 102)

In another poem in the same volume, "Days to Recollect," Hardy lovingly describes his past days with Emma only to seemingly tease her for being dead: "You don't recall / That day in Fall? / Then do you remember / That sad November / When you left me never to see me more. . . . / Say you remember / That sad November!" (PW III 134).

Such poems, often slight in themselves, have a cumulative effect for Hardy's reader. The peculiar combination of pleasure in and regret for the dead is almost uniquely his: a "free-play" which is inherent in the use of the dead as a source of inspiration, poetic vocabulary. This sense of "use" could perhaps even be supplied, as a final extreme example, to the poems which Hardy wrote on the animal world. Hardy often uses animals as vehicles for a slowly dawning understanding, and especially to cast an idiosyncratic eye at death. He also cared for his animals. One of the best of the almost absurb but touching elegies to his pets is "Last Words to a Dumb Friend," written in 1904. Hardy

brilliantly plays on the theme of "better forgotten," but at the same time shows an overpowering will to remember, to be haunted and to reinscribe on his memory the very marks that are supposedly effaced.[1] The sheer excess of the verse compared to its subject-matter emphasizes the paradox, and the painful over-development of consciousness which will not tolerate a purely "natural" relationship with death:

> Better blankness day by day
> Than companion torn away.
> Better bid his memory fade,
> Better blot each mark he made,
> Selfishly escape distress
> By contrived forgetfulness,
> Than preserve his prints to make
> Every morn and eve an ache (PW II 435)

He is well aware that the memory that is thus (supposedly) purged would not exist at all, despite his affection, were it not for the pet's death. In order to cherish its memory in this way, the object must be absent: the house which "scarcely took / Impress from his little look, / By his faring to the Dim / Grows all eloquent of him." One is reminded of a pet-poem from Hardy's final volume, "The Mongrel," in which the master drowns his dog by throwing a stick into the ebb-tide, in order not to pay the tax on it. As he said in his ode for the RSPCA, "helplessness breeds tyranny / In power above assail" (PW III 147). It would, of course, be perverse to turn these words on the man who attempts to "speak for" animals as he did the dead; but it is within the same paradigm of dumbness and fidelity that many of Hardy's conflicts about his subject-matter are played out.

1. Millgate, p. 489, links Hardy's regret for his pets to the more cultivated aspects of his remembrance of the dead: an "enclosed mental garden" which he can enter at will.

2.3 Last Things

The third main sub-section of this chapter deals with two topics which could be said to be generated by the prospect of the "literary ending": the question of Hardy's poetic "testament" and the problems of authority it raised; and his "final" poems.

2.3.1 Hardy and Posterity: The Burden of Words

Hardy's peculiar negativity goes further than simply the suggestion that he is already dead; it extends to a wish that he had never been. This, as a number of critics have pointed out, is an attitude shared by many of his characters. Henchard's will ends its terrible list with the wish "that no man remember me"; Jude curses the day that he was born; and Tess in the poetic lament which Hardy later wrote says "I'd have my life unbe."[1] Henchard, Winterbourne, and Jude all commit something akin to suicide.[2] The impulse is defensive in a much more radical way than in the "sure game" of pessimism, for what he evades are not only the trials of life, but also those of death, of being condemned to live on in memory, all the traces of one's life surviving (it is as if we have moved over the divide in Hamlet's soliloquy between the "heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks" to the "undiscovered country" where, he suspects, worse may happen). In Hardy himself, it is manifested in a desire to keep his innermost self as well as aspects of his past from the eyes of the world, even to wipe out all trace other than the approved

1. See Miller, Distance and Desire, ch. 7; Bruce E. Miller, "Motives of Annihilation in Hardy's Novels," CLAJ, 19 (1978), 389-403; and Lawrence J. Starzyk, "The Coming Universal Wish Not to Live in Hardy's 'Modern' Novels," NCF, 26 (1972), 419-35.
2. Hardy had been preoccupied with the question of suicide, since Horace Moule's death in 1873, quoting, for example, Milton's defense of it in Paradise Lost, Book X. See Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy, pp. 180-84.

version. In a curious poem from Winter Words Hardy suggests that words themselves are a burden, unless they are cleansed of human consciousness after death:

> If I could but abide
> As a tablet on a wall,
> Or a hillock daisy-pied,
> Or a picture in a hall,
> And as nothing else at all,
> I should feel no doleful achings,
> I should hear no judgement-call,
> Have no evil dreams or wakings,
> No uncouth or grisley care;
> In a word, no cross to bear. (PW III 171)

Words themselves, the final lines could imply, are the writer's cross "cross," a sacrifice of the self and a painful exposure. The letter killeth.

The "coming universal wish not to be" in Jude the Obscure is a product of Hardy's dualism. The over-evolved consciousness cannot endure the harsh reality of the world, so -- as a later poem puts it -- it takes itself away to another world "where no pains are." But if the poet is to do so, he must provide a protective "shell," an exterior image of himself: a final form both for his life and works. To fail to do so is to become like Henchard or Jude, a victim of a story, to be written rather than to write, and to risk becoming like the sorry unquiet ghosts of "Spectres that Grieve":

> "We are stript of rights; our shames lie unredressed,
> Our deeds in full autonomy are not shown,
> Our words in morsels merely are expressed
> On the scriptured page, our motives blurred, unknown."
> (PW II 38)

How were Hardy's deeds to be shown "in full autonomy"? Hardy had, I think, two answers to that question, related to the division which he enforced between his private and public selves. On one front, he strenuously denied the possibility that any critic, or even that anyone

at all, could understand the real meaning of his work: it was hidden within him. Numerous letters, prefaces, even poems which can be seen as "allegories of reading" are intended to enforce this point -- that he is "not known" (the title of one of his late poems), but also that there was a secret to his works which he would take to his grave. On the other front, he usually denied that there was a biographical meaning to his work, and worked to establish an "official" version of his life. In this, Hardy can be seen both as a Romantic, asserting the priority of the creative ego, and, paradoxically, as a Modernist emphasizing the linguistic artefact as independent of the writer's subjectivity. But this "resolution" was not an easy one, and Hardy's self-division produced, as I will show, a number of problems of authority.

Such problems were a direct result of Hardy's attitude to poetry. As he described it after abandoning novel-writing, poetry affords scope for the display of feelings in a context freed from all the local detail which led, say, the architect in A Pair of Blue Eyes to be identified with Hardy.[1] In his later years, Hardy often insisted on a lyric purity, free from realism, for his own non-poetic productions. He enjoyed saying that The Dynasts was unplayable in any real theatre and emphasized the return to an unemcumbered staging in The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall, in much the same way that in a letter written in 1908 he had insisted that Shakespeare was "a poet, man of letters, and seer of life" rather than a man of the theatre.[2] The "purity" of art rested on the centrality of poetry, jealously guarded in his later years. This can be seen as a desire to vanish behind the mask of his verse; but also as the opposite, an escape from the exigencies of realism to a freer world,

1. This was a reading Hardy frequently protested against, eg. EL 96-97.
2. Letters, III, 313; LY 235-36. Grundy, pp. 70-105, discusses Hardy's attitude to the theatre and its "mental performance," suggesting that his sense of himself as a "watcher" informs his theatrical vision.

where he may talk about himself without fears of criticism. To write novels with terrifyingly pessimistic endings is contentious; to write ballads with the same conclusions is merely traditional. There is thus a paradox about Hardy's self-effacement, for it brings both freedom from attention and a heightened subjectivity to the author. It is visible throughout his entire career in a tension between "invisibility" and his highly idiosyncratic "mode of regard," but the tension becomes more visible in the subjective mode of poetry, where withdrawal produces an even greater openess.

What Hardy almost always argues in his later work is that the "inner" truth of any life remains unexpressed. A poem is a skeleton, a trace, not (in theory) a voice or a person; and the spark that will cross the gap of the centuries is one that has been cleansed of the dross of personality. The ideal poet in this respect is Shakespeare:

> Thou, who display'dst a life of commonplace,
> Leaving no intimate word or personal trace
> Of high design outside the artistry
> Of thy penned dreams,
> Shall remain at heart unread eternally. (PW II 171)

This self-protective insistence on the "mask" of the poet lies behind the numerous insistence on his audiences not reading personal meaning into the verses.[1] At times, Hardy simply versifies his prose pronouncements on this, as in his 1914 poem "Not Known," originally subtitled "After reading criticism":

> They know a phasm they name as me,
> In whom I should not find
> A single self-held quality
> Of body or mind. (PW III 261)

There are a number of other poems in Winter Words, including "So Various," which assert the predominance of mask over essence in public

1. Zeitlow, pp. 46-48, provides an entire list of what he calls Hardy's "protective masks." Hardy also used the phrase "Architectural Masks" as the title of a poem (PW I 199).

perceptions of the poet. "A Poet's Thought" is particularly interesting for the ambiguity which it generates about whether it is the world which "mangles and mains" his writing, or simply aging and the operation of time (a suggestion stronger in the first draft):

> It sprang up out of him in the dark,
> And took on the lightness of a lark:
> It went from his chamber along the city strand,
> Lingered awhile, then leapt all over the land.
>
> It came back maimed and mangled. And the poet
> When he beheld his offspring did not know it:
> Yea, verily, since its birth Time's tongue had tossed to him
> Such travesties that his old thought was lost to him.
> (PW III 200-201)

The stylistic movement of the poem reproduces what it describes, progressing from the Shelleyan first stanza to the less smooth versification and weak rhymes of the second stanza. The poet's estrangement from his own "poetic" self is thus heightened by the presence of a chronological development.

With such a relationship to his own work, the poet becomes even more distant from his audience. Like Shakespeare he will "remain at heart unread." It is, in this context, interesting to compare Hardy's earlier and later, more personal use of the metaphor of "reading" a person. The novels often describe faces being read, or even being written upon, as in The Return of the Native:

> The face was well shaped, even excellently. But the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncracies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly overrun by its parasite, thought. . . .[1]

Elsewhere, Hardy similarly "reads" traces of past situations in their external remnants -- clothes in "A Gentleman's Second-hand Suit," for example, and he even attempts to "read" Emma's presence in the Cornish landscape; though notably, he failed to "read" the signs of her imminent

1. The Return of the Native, p. 156.

death on her face (PW II 49). But in many of the late poems reading is often an internalized process, with no possibility of the outside world's participating. There is the scrawl-covered cavern which is the mind in "In a Former Resort After Many Years"; but an even more striking figure is provided by "His Heart: A Woman's Dream." Hardy imagines his own death as it might have happened before Emma's (or, just possibly, he describes his own reflection on Emma's death within the disguise of a role-reversal).[1] In a grotesque scene, a widow cuts her husband's heart from his dead body in order to peruse the "unguessed things found written on it":

> It was inscribed like a terrestrial sphere
> With quaint vermiculations close and clear --
> His graving. (PW II 199)

The truth of their relationship, previously obscured by "life's storms," is clearly written there, but only knowable after the loved one has died. The context of the poem suggests Hardy's reading of his wife's diaries; an intimate act of marital communion which ends in the poem with the heart simply being replaced in the body (just as Hardy burnt most of his wife's secret writings). For the reader who has no such privileged access, the poet will remain, literally, "at heart unread."

In most of the poems which I have quoted, Hardy comments fairly directly on the fate of his work. In a number of other poems he provides what could be called parables of misinterpretation, in which the danger of attributing motives to or misreading the dead is implied. One example is the sardonic narrative which might be Hardy's version of Balzac's "The Unknown Masterpiece," "The Collector Cleans His Picture." Like Balzac's tale, it is a story of self-consuming obsession, but an uncovering rather than a covering, in which a retired vicar whose only pleasure is to

1. See Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p. 274.

restore old canvasses in the hope of discovering a masterpiece spends a night cleaning what he hopes will be a portrait of a beauty, only to find a hag revealed beneath the "gatherings of slow years" (PW II 388). The revealed image mocks the lust for possession which motivates him: the terms used, "love's inhibited dreamings" assailing him in "mounting manhood," imply mastabatory fantasies; and the "lashing lesson" he is given is equally suggestive. The "truth" is sordid; and in this poem the restorer is depicted as a voyeur who discovers only an image reflecting his own pathology. He is an over-reader rather than a restorer.

The same topic is treated in terms of sculpture in an earlier poem. The narrator of "The Statue of Liberty" watches a man cleaning a statue in a square. His first conjecture is that it is the man's job -- the "obvious," public interpretation of what is going on. This is refuted, and the next motive attributed (based on the cleaner's statement that "the doing is dear") is a combination of public and private, a love of liberty. This too is "an idler's vision." The truth, the cleaner says, is entirely personal; the model was his daughter, who died far from him in this town, and he cleans the statue for the sake of her and her "good name." But at this point the narrator offers his knowledge of the situation, revealing that <u>he</u> is the artist who made the sculpture, and knows the truth:

> Answer I gave not. Of that form
> The carver was I at his side;
> His child, my model, held so saintly,
> Grand in feature,
> Gross in nature,
> In the dens of vice had died. (PW II 189-90)

As an "allegory of reading" the poem is fascinating. We are led through a thicket of successively more privileged interpretations of the statue and the relationship of the admirer to it, to find that even the

biological and social connection of the father to his daughter is inadequate to the truth of the situation. The statue conceals as much as it reveals, and there is an excess of meaning to it as if it would say more than it can about the dead. This excess is mirrored in the poem's movement, like that of "The Collector Cleans His Picture" a progress which the workman thinks is "from foul to fair," but which in the process of reading reverts from fair to foul; revealing a corruption within which mocks the efforts of that "busy man" the naive reader.

In other poems, Hardy focuses not on readers, but on the fate of the works after death. "The Torn Letter" is one of a number of poems on the destruction of images or letters -- here the protagonist immediately rejects the letter's being torn up, and unsuccessfully attempts to reconstruct it (in particular, he has lost the "name and place" of his correspondent: the means of access (PW II 19). Such poems reinforce the idea that the poet cannot be "recovered" from his work. One could also point to the poems which Hardy wrote on the obliteration of inscriptions on stone. Words are, as D. Drew Cox insists, more durable than stone; but Hardy often compares the act of writing to monumental inscription, and makes the fading of such inscriptions a metaphor for the decline of reputation.[1] He also, in a well-known passage, writes of the effect of time on works like the Authorized Version: "They translated into the language of their age; then the years began to corrupt the language as spoken, and to add grey lichen to the translation; until the moderns who use the corrupted tongue marvel at the poetry of the old words" (LY 186). Hardy is, however, careful to distinguish the provenance of such effects from those writers who, like himself, "make themselves practical poets." His works are not to be subject to such forces. It is significant that in the various attempts which Hardy made to revise his

1. Cox, "The Poet and the Architect," p. 60.

works and align his corpus towards posterity, he tended to prune his dialect words and to generally smooth its presentation.[1] He was, as his essays on William Barnes show, acutely aware of the decay of dialect: it to could be weathered and obliterated.[2] And when he came to write an epitaph for his grandfather and uncle, he justified his use of Latin on the score of its permanence (LY 102). All these facts imply a resistance to obliteration, an attempt to preserve. It is at this point that we can usefully turn from Hardy's assertions and justifications of his being "not known" to the opposite: his desire that he be known, in the authorized version of the story.

I have suggested that the "inner" nature of Hardy's work is, according to his theory, inaccessible. But what of the printed words? Hardy was a writer who maintained a firm distinction between content and style, and in a sense he offered his works to the world as examples of well-wrought objects; it was the treatment and scope of them that he saw as the proper object of criticism.[3] But the externality of poetry nevertheless implied a sensitivity: poetry is like a skin. One of the poems in which Hardy identifies with trees, "The Tree and the Lady," provides a fortuitous pun. The "Lady" has abandoned the tree which she played under in spring:

1. This is the finding of Hynes, pp. 145-47; and of Henry Gifford, "Hardy's Revisions (Satires of Circumstance)," Agenda, 10, Nos. 2-3 (1972), 126-37. A slightly different conclusion is that of Norman Page in his "Hardy and the English Language," in Thomas Hardy: The Writer and his Background, pp. 151-72, who points out that Hardy sometimes revised in the opposite direction, towards a greater toughness and oddity.
2. Hardy was, however, aware of the necessity of a fidelity to the dying tradition which was present in Barnes: there is, as I showed earlier, a tension between such fidelity and the aesthetic imperatives of preservation. On his attitude to Barnes, see C.H. Sisson, "Hardy and Barnes," Agenda, 10, Nos. 2-3 (1972), 47-49.
3. John Hollander has described Hardy as one of the last poets for whom there is a clear division between form and content. See his Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 137.

> I'm a skeleton now,
> And she's gone, craving warmth. The rime sticks like a skin to me;
> Through me Arcturus peers; Nor'lights shoot into me. . . .
> (PW II 282)

We could see this as an analogy for the skeletal Hardy, with the exposed "skin" of rhyme the hoar-frost of his own winter.[1] Hardy's hatred of reviewers is an index of his exposure: he complained about the "perenial inscription" which they would set on his writing (PW III 165), and argued that the corpus should not be hacked about. It is unfair, he wrote in 1908, to "cull from a dead writer's whole achievement in verse portions that shall exhibit him."[2] His work must not be re-written, his corpus must not be dismembered, and -- most importantly -- his life must not be the subject of speculation. "Fiction" (ie. his writings) and "fact" (ie. life) must not be confused, as he wrote in a passage attacking journalists and biographers in 1912. "If any statements in the dress of fiction are covertly hinted to be fact, all must be fact. . . . The power of getting lies believed about people through that channel after they are dead, by stirring in a few truths, is a horror to contemplate" (LY 153). Hardy returned to the same object in an entry dated 1919, arguing that books which <u>seem</u> to be true cannot be accepted as fact in any way, despite their being true "in essence" (he applies this especially to his romances) (LY 195).[3]

The context in which this second discussion is presented is interesting. Hardy begins with Defoe, who went "to extreme lengths of assurance . . . in respect of a tale he knew to be absolutely false."

1. Hardy himself used the term "verse skeletons" to describe poetic forms considered entirely independently of content (LY 79).
2. <u>Personal Writings</u>, pp. 76-77. Cf. his comments to Archer in 1909, <u>Letters</u>, IV, 24.
3. This is not, of course, the same as Hardy's theories of fiction, which are not formed under the pressure to maintain such a division. He could happily call art "a disproportioning . . . of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter" (EL 299) -- a method which he would have been horrified to see applied to his own life, or even to his work.

Hardy had, by this time, embarked on a curiously similar deception -- though a mirror image of Defoe's -- in claiming an "objective" status for his autobiography, planning to publish it under his wife's name. The origins of the Life have been well documented. Hardy always denied he would write an autobiography, but seems to have been prompted to by the appearances of various writings about him, particularly the Hedgecock biography and Edward Clodd's memoirs, deciding to do so perhaps as early as 1915.[1] It was to derive its authority from being a sanctioned biography written by his wife, using his notebooks; yet the same ploy would enable him to distance himself from it and exist in the third person, to maintain that ghostly existence which I have described. It represents closure, and withdrawal. The documents which surround it are particularly interesting in this respect: the disclaimers in the "Prefatory Note," for example, which assert that the notebook entries quoted are often "his passing thoughts only," but that "great trouble has been taken to secure exactness" in the renditions of his saying (EL vii-viii). The "Private Memorandum" to Florence Hardy gives detailed instructions on how she should distance him from the work (with some confusion: he occasionally slips into the wrong person); he writes in the "Things Not Done" list that he should "Put in will that I have written no autobiogy." as well as a reminder that he should destroy old notebooks, "experiments" in dramatization, even destroying "marks in printed books" in the process of self-effacement.[2] Hardy thus withdraws from his own story as he renders it, enforcing that division between his inner and outer selves which I described.

It so presenting a definitive account of his life, Hardy was attempting to write his own epitaph -- or rather, to write in that mode

1. See Millgate, p. 516; Gittings, The Older Hardy, pp. 178-80.
2. Personal Notebooks, pp. 100-02, 195, 288-89.

which Paul H. Fry identifies with the epitaph: "not the pursuit of voice, but the burial of voice, a concession to the tomblike bar between signifier and signified that leaves only the bar itself as theme and place of presentation."[1] Hardy in crossing the bar attempts (to mix metaphors) to latch the postern behind him, to prevent us from reading his corpus for the traces of desire which he saw in other's memories. Of course, the attempt to deceive posterity ended in failure: we tend to read Hardy's ghost-writing of his life in precisely the way in which he wished to exclude. It would be more of a mystery if the attempt had not succeeded for some decades, but the fact that Hardy was willing to try to do so bespeaks a powerful repression of his own doubts. He must have wished to see it succeed, and as I suggested earlier, the Life seems to have been important to his late career, the achievement of a "safe" container for his own subjectivity, allowing him a considerable freedom behind the official mask. It was, in the deepest sense, written for his own satisfaction.

The carefully nurtured distinction between public and private man is thus crucial to an understanding of late Hardy. For his friends, it could provide puzzling incongruities. Hardy was a "a great author: he was not a great man," in an often-quoted phrase.[2] T.E. Lawrence, commenting on the fact that the human Hardy had been for years "transparent with frailty," almost a living ghost, wrote a letter of condolence to Florence in which he comments perceptively on the way in which the authorial persona was constructed (Lawrence was one of those who had been suggested as an editor for the Life). He wrote: "T.H. was infinitely bigger than the man who died three days back -- and you were

1. Fry, "The Absent Dead," p. 433.
2. Gittings, The Older Hardy, p. 173, attributes this phrase to Clodd, from a letter of 14 April 1928 to J.H. Bulloch. Millgate, however, points out that in a diary entry of 23 June 1910 Clodd attributes it to Florence Dugdale (Millgate, pp. 469, 611 fn. 72).

one of the architects."[1] But Florence Hardy was to live with the legacy of Hardy's reputation, cruelly satirized in Maugham's Cakes and Ale as the curator of the Hardy museum and, indeed, as one of the architects responsible for the public monument behind which Maugham thought he could see a sadder story.

2.3.2 Hardy's "Last Poems"

There are a large number of poems in Hardy's last volume which can be seen to provide the final form of topoi which are repeated throughout his career: childhood in "Childhood Among the Ferns," the dawn in "Lying Awake," bird-imagery in "The Boy's Dream" and the volume's penultimate poem, minimalism in "He Never Expected Much," and so on. Of course, much of this quality of finality and summation is a product of the reader's response to a last work -- we could identify some similar poems in Human Shows -- but it is also true that Hardy seems to have expected Winter Words to be his last volume, if we can take his comments in the "Introductory Note" at face value. There are a number of poems in Winter Words which do seem to attempt a conscious summation of various themes, or to release to the world a final message previously hidden, or to confront the poet's death: to attempt, that is, a final gesture of the kind which I have described.[2] Some of those poems I have already examined, and I will take only one example here from the main body of Winter Words, before looking more closely at Hardy's end-pieces as they evolve towards the poems which end that volume.

1. The Letters of T.E. Lawrence, ed. David Garnett (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), p. 564. Lawrence added, in a different letter, "T.H. had perfected himself in his work, and went into the grave very poor in spirit"(p. 566).
2. Orel, p. 117, remarks on the way in which "Preparation for a final reckoning informs many of the poems in Hardy's last volumes of verse," particularly, he suggests, the religious poems. See also Jacobus, "Hardy's Magian Retrospect," pp. 258-59.

Writing of Hardy's treatment of death in his novels, Norman Page points out that he tends to slip over the moment of death, and to dwell on the dead body rather than any death-scene.[1] In Hardy's poetry too there is more emphasis on the already dead than the act of dying, and on the fate of the author after death. Nevertheless, there are a number of poems in which Hardy writes of his own death, often as a movement across some final boundary. As Yeats was to do, Hardy wrote one poem in his final volume which could be said to describe a traditional "good death."[2] "Squire Hooper" hears at the age of ninety that he is about to die, but sends his guests off for their day's shooting before retiring decorously to his coffin (PW III 220-21). But a much more interesting death-poem is provided by "Throwing a Tree," a piece which was, according to one apocryphal report, another Hardy "Last Poem."[3] It describes the felling of a tree in the New Forest, and is a small masterpiece of naturalistic description. The "two executioners" approach "the proud tree that bears the death-mark on its side" and begin their task. A rope is hooked up, "the saw then begins," the tree shivers "grow greater," and they try to pull the tree down. The rhetoric reproduces the drama of the process and pulls the reader in, until in the final stanza the two men, now no longer anonymous, complete their task. The long final over-flowing line duplicates the action which it describes; a slow growth followed by release:

> Then, lastly, the living mast sways, further sways: with a shout
> Job and Ike rush aside. Reaching the end of its long staying powers
> The tree crashes downward: it shakes all its neighbours throughout,
> And two hundred years' steady growth has been ended in less than two hours. (PW III 192)

1. Norman Page, "Hardy's Deathbeds," in the Thomas Hardy Annual, No. 3, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 93-110.
2. The poem draws on a source in John Hutchin's The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset. See F.B. Pinion, A Commentary on the Poems of Thomas Hardy (London" Macmillan, 1976), p. 247.
3. The claim was made when the poem was first printed in Commerce (Paris), Winter 1927, pp. 5-7, translated by Paul Valéry. Bailey, pp. 585-86, dismisses it.

J.O. Bailey suggests, rightly I think, that Hardy identifies with the tree, pointing out that there is throughout his work (in Under the Greenwood Tree, for example) a "fetishistic feeling that human lives are mysteriously linked to the lives of trees."[1] In Winter Words alone there are two other poems on trees, including one addressed to a tree, and another in which a woman's life is linked to that of an elm. In 1920 Hardy wrote in a letter that he himself was "as stationary as a tree and [I] don't feel any the worse for it."[2] The tree, like the genealogical tree, stands as a symbol of continuity, and his own "sire-sown tree" (as he calls it in "The Pedigree") was coming to an end with the death of his generation of Hardys. Even the "two hundred years" of growth roughly corresponds to the length of family memory back to this great-grandparents, as he describes it in the Life.[3] The tree's death is thus also his own death.

The poem has, however, another important association. In 1887 Hardy was asked to choose three "Fine Passages in Verse and Prose" for a symposium in the Fortnightly Review. The first passage he selected was that from Carlyle's The French Revolution on "the silent growth of the oak." It begins:

> The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it falls.[3]

Things make themselves known when they fall, Carlyle suggests in this passage, which was surely in Hardy's mind when he wrote "Throwing a Tree." And History, Carlyle goes on to say, knows things only in

1. Bailey, pp. 585, 593. Pinion, p. 241, suggests that the poem was also influenced by Barnes's "Vellèn the Tree."
2. One Rare Fair Woman: Thomas Hardy's Letters to Florence Henniker, 1893-1922, ed. Evelyn Hardy and F.B. Pinion (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 194.
3. In the ms. Hardy wrote "seventy-odd years" -- the length of his own life.
4. Personal Writings, pp. 106-10.

their endings and blockages, "knows so little that were not as well unknown. . . . mere sin and misery; not work, but hindrance of work!" If the association of the two texts is accepted, then it is easy to see in "Throwing a Tree" a version of Carlyle's polemic on history. Posterity will not focus on the silent growth as it should, but will show instead a fascination for discontinuity and "what was misdone or undone." In this, it is like Hardy, and "Throwing a Tree" can be seen as a "death poem" in another respect as well, duplicating Hardy's fascination with endings, but also lodging a protest at the undoing of time, and perhaps also the exposure of the worst moments of his own life. Two hours reading -- about the time it might take to pick one's way through Winter Words -- or even less is all that is required to unpick that "two hundred years" steady growth" which finds its final repository in Hardy's last volume.

Endings thus present problems of authority and control like those which I discussed in the previous section. The title-poem of Moments of Vision -- Hardy's first volume written entirely after Emma's death -- is a meditation on the last moment and the revelations it brings. The ending brings "That mirror / Which makes of men a transparency":

> That mirror
> Can test each mortal when unaware;
> Yea, that strange mirror
> May catch his last thoughts, whole life foul or fair,
> Glassing it -- where? (PW II 159)

The mirror is that in which the poet sees his own inner nature: it "throws our mind back on us, and our heart." But it is also associated with literature and with death: the reflexive "doubling" in which the self is seen as external, incarnate in language. The final question -- "where?" -- seems to concern the fate of that revealed self at the moment of death: what will be the relationship between the "life foul or fair"

and the moment of death? In order to answer that question, I will look at Hardy's "last" poems in more detail, taking particular note of what I have called the "final gestures" in those poems, and the relationship between the living voice of the poet and his writing hand.

Hardy was well acquainted with the figure of the hand making a final signal; he uses it in a number of poems. Moments of Vision includes a poem on the death of William Barnes, in which Hardy sees a flash from the setting sun, reflected off the coffin of his friend. He comments: "Thus a farewell to me he signalled on his grave-way, / As with a wave of his hand" (PW II 213). In another poem on the death which was second in its importance to him only to those of his immediate family, he uses a folk-myth to describe Horace Moule confronting his death. The dating of the poem is unknown (most critics assume that it was held over until his last volume: Moule's suicide had been a difficult subject), but in it Hardy shows Moule watching the candle "shaping to a shroud" as it burns, the sign of an approaching death in Dorset tradition.[1] Both at the beginning of the poem and the end Moule touches the candle. The poem's middle sections are controversial, referring to some biographical secret, but at the end Moule makes a gesture which refers to "yonside the tomb," but also -- like Keats's gesture -- seems to come from death, from the poem and the past, creating its own "now":

> And let the candle-wax thus mould a shape
> Whose meaning now, if I hid before, you know,
> And how by touch one present claims its drape,
> And that it's I who press my finger -- so. (PW III 226)

There is, of course, an irony in Hardy's cautiously presenting this poem, fifty-five years after Moule's death. Hardy was highly conscious of the fictionality of endings, and the distance between the gestures of art and the plotting of life had been brought home to him by his wife's death --

1. Bailey, p. 602.

the fact that she made no final signal is a recurrent theme. Margaret Mahar argues that such an inconsonance of plotting and life was responsible for Hardy's abandonment of the novel: the present cannot fulfill the past, and endings as what Kermode calls "kairos" become less and less possible.[1]

Partly because of this awareness of the difficulty of endings in Hardy, it is important to be aware of the vein of self-conscious irony in the carefully placed and crafted poems with which he ended his late volumes. One must also be aware of the relationship which they have with the beginning poems of the volumes which followed. Each formal farewell was an anticipation of death which the next volume would supplement and override. A wry irony informs Hardy's response to "beginning again" in poems like "Weathers," the blithe opening poem of Late Lyrics and Earlier which depicts Hardy as a disinterested watcher who waits, timelessly, and sees the world go past. The opening poem of Human Shows, "Waiting Both," seems to gently parody the idea of the stellification of poets, or of astral influx:

A star looks down at me,
And says: "Here I and you
Stand, each in our degree:
What do you mean to do, --
    Mean to do?"

I say: "For all I know,
Wait, and let Time go by,
Till my change come. " -- " Just so,"
The star says: "So mean I: --
    So mean I." (PW III 7)

The first poem of Winter Words recalls the less intense ending of the previous volume in suggesting a tongue-in-cheek surprise: "What are you doing outside my walls, / O dawn of another day?" (PW III 167).

Proper attention to his own last poems came for Hardy only after the death of his wife. Poems of the Past and Present (1901) ends with a

1. Mahar, pp. 304-05.

group entitled "Retrospect," but they deal with Hardy's hopes and self-characterization rather than "signing-off" in any sense.[1] Time's Laughstockings (1909) ends with an assortment of poems, including Hardy's poem on Meredith, but the volume concludes with "A Young Man's Epigram on Existence," hardly a serious final statement. The last poem of Satires of Circumstance, on the other hand, is "A Poet," the epitaph to his own self which I discussed earlier (I am treating the volume in its original ordering: Hardy subsequently felt embarassed about the "Satires" section and placed them at the end of the volume).[2] Moments of Vision ends its main grouping with one of Hardy's most visionary poems in the via negativa mode, "'For Life I had never cared greatly.'" The main body is followed by a short group of "Poems of War and Patriotism," which itself has a strong end-piece, "'I looked up from my writing'" -- a poem which explains why death has overlooked Hardy, implicitly amidst all the carnage of the surrounding war. The volume ends with two further end-pieces, collectively labelled "Finale": "The Coming of the End" and "Afterwards." The first of these discusses endings, in particular the way in which his wife's death came as a surprise, despite his attempts to anticipate it. "Afterwards" introduces a different note: it anticipates the poet's death, describing the reactions of others to the passing of one who had an eye for nature's mysteries. His neighbours are to see him as an absence in nature, every occurence producing a comment like "To him this must have a familiar sight." Hardy thus uses a version of the

1. "'I have lived with Shades'" deals with Hardy's recognition of himself as a shade in a way which is typical of his pessimism in the 1890s: it is a protective prophecy rather than a surview. "Memory and I" deals with his creative process and memory as its ghostly principle, and the final poem is a protest against the workings of "the unknown god" in a way that predicts future poetry.
2. The two poems dealt with here were followed in the 1914 volume by a postcript, the war-poem "'Men who march away,'" which Hardy transferred to the beginning of the group of "Poems of War and Patriotism" in Moments of Vision in 1917.

traditional idea of nature's lament, tempered by his characteristic quietism. But the poem is also full of a rhetoric which anticipates his death in its movement; from the overt metaphor of the Present shutting the gate behind him in stanza one to the "eyelid's soundless blink" and the hawk which "comes crossing the shades" in stanza two, and the shift in tenses in stanza three: "he could do little for them; and now he is gone" (PW II 308). In stanza four he speculates: "Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees, / Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more . . . ," lines which suggest that the thought of Hardy will rise like a star -- but also that his face can be retraced in the mind. In the poem's final stanza there is a "bell of quittance" which Hardy imagines, while "a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings," the breeze itself a wind of death. In the manuscript the line reads "And a crossing breeze makes a blank in its utterings," the "blank" (which refers us to the other "blanks" which I discussed earlier) implying a text which has been wiped clean. Hardy's voice will be cut or rendered blank, but it will rise up again after his death, as the final two lines -- which enforce a division between voice and eye -- suggest:

> And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
> And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
> Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
> "He hears it not now, but used to notice such things"?

The poem thus serves to sever the poet's posthumous "voice" from his idiosyncratic eye, incorporating the images which suggest this internal schism into the description of his death (the bell) with remarkable economy.

The final group of poems in Late Lyrics and Earlier includes another pessimistic "Epitaph" -- the poem's title -- summarizing Hardy's negativity: "I never cared for Life: Life Cared for me" (PW II 481).

"An Ancient to Ancients" sees Hardy celebrating the vanishing of all things, but balancing the eclipsing of some reputations with the rise of others, and discussing the late creativity of Sophocles, Plato, and others, who "Burnt brighter towards their setting day" (PW 483) -- the poem is almost a versification of his contemporary critical pronouncements. The two last poems of the volume are a different matter. Both return to the biblical texts of Hardy's youth, "After Reading Psalms XXXIX, XL, etc." to trace his development from youth to later life (though he dates the poem from the 1870s); and "Surview" to provide a harrowing self-criticism in which the sticks of the fire -- in a way that Hardy may have learnt on his mother's knee -- talk to him of his own failure to be true to his highest standards. It is a history of life's fundamental incompleteness, and of the superiority of the (biblical) text to any individual. This poem also enforces a division between voice and the text. It opens:

> A cry from the green-grained sticks in the fire
> Made me gaze where it seemed to be:
> 'Twas my own voice talking therefrom to me. . . .
> (PW II 485)

The "fire" recalls the "ashes from an old flame" which served as epigraph to the "Poems of 1912-13," but now it is the ashes from his own life which stir Hardy, as if he has entered his Virgilian purgatory to find his own shade accusing him rather than his Dido.[1] Hardy's own voice talks most typically to himself, as this internal colloguy suggests, so again the poem suggests a removal of voice as the "sticks burnt low, and the fire went out, / And my voice ceased talking to me."

The final two poems of Human Shows contain a similar dialogue between images of voice and text. In "Song to an Old Burden" the song is to a tune which is called by phantoms -- the ghosts of

1. Another possible influence is Tennyson's internal dialogue in "The Two Voices."

memory, which seem wearying (the poem is half protest). The final poem, "'Why do I?,'" conveys the same tiredness, moving from the protest of the "I" to a perspective outside the poet: he answers his own question. The poet's "two selves" are divided by this gesture, the human Hardy in the world of "mechanic repetitions" separated from the soul of the poet with its traditional "dusty cloak" and "wondrous wings." Again, there is a retreat into silence:

> When shall I leave off doing these things? --
> When I hear
> You have dropped your dusty cloak and taken your wondrous wings
> To another sphere,
> Where no pain is: Then shall I hush this dinning gear.
> (PW III 157)

In Hardy's final volume there is, at a number of points, a comparable silencing, or even a refusal to speak. Even in the introduction he comments that the same "perennial inscription" will be set on his pages, but adds in a tantalising gesture that he will be "uncovering a place here and there" for the critics -- the garment is lifted for a moment. A similar approach to self-revelation is suggested by "Family Portraits": Hardy raises the ghosts only to send them back. And as I have suggested, the self-concealing theme of "Not Known" runs through this volume. Its final poem, one of the last which Hardy wrote, provides a fitting climax to Hardy's career. "He Resolves to Say No More" -- "He," not "I" -- is a complex version of the trope of <u>occupatio</u>, the rhetorical refusal to speak. Like so many of the other end-pieces in Hardy, it is addressed to Hardy, or rather to his soul (it was "heart" in the first draft, perhaps more revealingly):

> O my soul, keep the rest unknown!
> It is too like the sound of moan
> When the charnel-eyed
> Pale Horse has nighed:
> Yea, none shall gather what I hide!

Why load men's minds with more to bear
That bear already ails to spare?
From now alway
Till my last day
What I discern I will not say.

Let Time roll backward if it will;
(Magians who drive the midnight quill
With brain aglow
Can see it so,)
What I have learnt no man shall know.

And if my vision range beyond
The blinkered sight of soul's in bond
-- By truth made free --
I'll let all be,
And show to no man what I see. (PW III 274)

In its intent the poem is clear enough, at least initially. "The rest" is the truth of human nature, perceived in apocalyptic terms, and probably also what Hardy saw as the way which mankind was going. It is thus a truth <u>of</u> death -- of the human deathliness described in the volume's penultimate poem, "'We are getting to the end'" -- and as such, a burden or load. But in the final stanza it is the truth will achieve <u>in</u> death, after his release, which it is described; no longer a load, but the opposite, a Shelleyan flight of the soul beyond the confines of mundane existence. The opposition between the first two stanzas and the last suggests <u>two</u> Hardys: one the poet and novelist of pessimistic view who remains within his work, the other a liberated spirit, the man who dies, making this final gesture of refusal. The poem's movement thus "imitates" the moment of death, as did a number of the earlier end-pieces which I have discussed.

The man who died took a lot with him. The third stanza shares, I think, a good deal of the ambiguity which is created by the opposing view-points of the stanzas on either side of it. Why should Hardy speak of time rolling backward? The standard exegesis points us to the passage

in the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier (1922) in which he refers to men's minds "moving backward" -- regressing rather than progressing; and also perhaps to Shelley's Jewish sage Ahasuerus, who can summon up the past in his visions.[1] Neither of these sources seem to fit exactly, though the latter seems closer. Hardy seems to me to be referring to his personal experience, to the knowledge which he has gained and will take with him. In the "Apology" of 1922 he explicitly links the "new Dark Age" with the dominance of modes of criticism which he saw as prying and prone to "reading meanings into a book that its author never dreamt of writing there" (PW II 323). In this poem he seems to be pre-empting just such a backward writing. The hands of the midnight writers -- usually a description he reserved for himself -- will not rewrite "Thomas Hardy"; he cannot be known or recovered. His final poem thus denies that possible touch between the dead and the living, it is a gesture which turns inward, protecting rather than offering, or offering -- in the final stanza -- only to deny.

Despite the sense of strong closure attempted in "He Resolves to Say No More," Hardy seems to have been willing to go on writing. Florence Hardy reported that he experienced a burst of creativity in late 1927, and no doubt if he had lived on a further apology for his own survival would have been needed.[2] Of course, Hardy's actual poetic "last words" were the two squibs which he dictated on his deathbed, and which now conclude the "Uncollected Poems" sections of his works. Chesterton and Moore had both criticized Hardy in public, not only for his work, but for the type of man he was, and he had bitterly resented it. The two pieces are not, we are usually told, worthy of inclusion in his canon; and they were never meant to be. But they are perfect examples of the "leakage"

1. Pinion, p. 260; Taylor, p. 138.
2. Millgate, p. 568.

of violent feeling from that carefully crafted monument, evidence of his failure to control his reputation both in their subject matter and in their very existence. That they should be called "Epitaphs" heightens the irony; the commemorative mode which dominates Hardy's poetry is turned against his enemies, their graves maligned in his invective:

> Here lies nipped in this narrow cyst
> The literary contortionist. . . . (PW III 308)
>
> Heap dustbins on him: they'll not meet
> The apex of his self conceit. (PW III 309)

For all their ephemeral nature, they recall earlier Hardy poems: the "close bin with earthen sides" of "'Not only I,'" the pyramid of "The Monument-maker." In his last defensive gesture, Hardy again returns to the graveside and testifies of his enduring preoccupations.

Chapter 3 : W.B. Yeats

The idea that W.B. Yeats's last poems are his best is not a new one. His oldest friend, George Russell (AE), greeted The Winding Stair (1929) with the moving tribute: "It is one of the rarest things in literature to find a poet of whom it might be said that his wine was like that in the feast in the Scriptures, where the best was kept until the last. Here in this later poetry is the justification of the poet's intellectual adventures."[1] T.S. Eliot, in a famous lecture, similarly voiced his preference for Yeats's late work, arguing that it was only then that he expressed his emotional maturity.[2] With a few exceptions, Yeats's later readers have echoed these judgements, attributing a unique strength and intensity to the poems of Yeats's old age.[3]

Yeats's life is, however, one which places into sharp relief the question of what old age is in poets. He saw his own life as a symbolic pattern. "The origins of a poet," he wrote in 1929, "are not in that which he has cast off because it is not himself, but in his own mind and in the past of literature" (L 767). When he reviewed his own life he did not produce a conventional autobiography, but a subjective and often heavily distorted appraisal of his art and recurring obsessions in terms

1. Quoted by Henry Summerfield, "AE as a Literary Critic," in Myth and Reality in Irish Literature, ed. Joseph Ronsley (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 57. The review appeared in The Irish Statesman, 1 Feb. 1930, pp. 436-37. The metaphor of poetry as matured wine is, of course, one which Yeats had himself used, notably in "On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac."
2. T.S. Eliot, "Yeats," the First Annual Yeats Lecture, delivered to the Friends of the Irish Academy at the Abbey Theatre in 1940. Published in Purpose and subsequently widely reprinted. Quoted here from On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), pp. 252-64.
3. Some of Yeats's readers have always, however, been repelled by the violence and political animus of Yeats's later work. John Crowe Ransom's "Old Age of a Poet," KR, 2 (1940), 345-47 is an early example; and more recently a number of works on Yeats's politics have attempted to grapple with this problem, while Harold Bloom in his Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) has attempted to correct what he sees as over-idealization of Yeats.

of the needs of his late career.[1] The accidents of personal life are absorbed into the myth of the self which Yeats called a "phantasmagoria." As he put it in the well-known passage from his "General Introduction" of 1937, the poet "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast, he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete" (E&I 509).

Any examination of Yeats's late phase must, therefore, deal with the poet's self-dramatization, and in particular with the sense of occasion which his endings generate. Terms like "testament," epitaph," "tombstone," proliferate in criticism of his late works, as do the poems to which such terms are applied. One writer describes "Under Ben Bulben" as "heroic man's self-exhortation," a "measure danced on his own grave," while other critics describe "Cuchulain Comforted" in similar testamentary terms.[2] Another calls the "General Introduction" "an epilogue to a life's work, a farewell soliloquy spoken by an unrepentant Celtic Prospero."[3] Other candidates for "last poem" include "Politics," the poem which Yeats seems to have ended his last volume, and "The Black Tower," which was probably the last poem which he drafted. The Death of Cuchulain has been seen as a dramatic epitaph, "a dramatization of Yeats . . . confronting the darkness before him," and Purgatory was described by Yeats himself in summational terms.[4] Clearly, there is a plethora of "endings" in Yeats's work, and we must see this copiousness as another example of Yeats's tendency to vacillate -- to test ideas,

1. See Daniel O'Hara, Tragic Knowledge: Yeats's Autobiography and Hermeneutics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), esp. ch. 2, for an account of this process of self-creation.
2. T.R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 268.
3. Edward Callan, Yeats on Yeats: The Last Introductions and the "Dublin" Edition, New Yeats Papers, XX (Mountrath: Dolmen Press, 1981), p. 13.
4. Barton R. Friedman, Adventures in the Deeps of the Mind: The Cuchulain Cycle of W.B. Yeats (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 143.

to both affirm and remain skeptical.[1] As a number of recent studies have argued, Yeats often managed to hold his occult beliefs in suspension with his assertions that they were heuristic.[2] This is so even if one believes, as one writer does, that Yeats's philosophical system crystalized with the publication of A Vision in its 1925 form.[3] I will argue strongly against those who see a "completed symbol" (Yeats's phrase) in A Vision (1925); but even if it were true that, as Phillip Sherrard puts it, "the graph of his poetry coincides with that of his metaphysics," there would still remain the necessity to explain the dynamics of his career after 1925.[4] Is it merely a working out of already formed ideas? A school of criticism opposed to the static view of Yeats's late career has argued that Yeats comes, in his last works, into "reality," abandoning his masks.[5]

Opinions on the shape and themes of Yeats's late career have in fact varied widely. T.R. Henn suggests that Yeats's life as a poet had four stages, the last (after the consolidation of the 1920s) being a "less determinate period, linked to the severe illness at Algeciras, and the end, as he saw it, of a phase in Irish politics and the larger European scene."[6] Other writers place less emphasis on the apocalyptic: Sherrard sees Yeats in his last phase as moved by a desire to reconnect the earth

1. Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, 2nd. ed. (London: Faber & Faber, 1964), p. 211, remarks that despite the fact that "A poet so conscious of his place in literature and history might be expected to leave a testament," Yeats does not provide "a set of fixed positions even at the end of his life." However Ellmann refers to "Under Ben Bulben" as "a gravestone" a few pages earlier.
2. See Steven Hemling, "Yeats's Esoteric Comedy," HudR, 30 (1977), 230-46; James Olney, "W.B. Yeats's Daimonic Memory," SR, 85 (1977), 583-603.
3. James L. Allen, "From Puzzle to Paradox: New Light on Yeats's Late Career," SR, 82 (1974), 81-92.
4. Phillip Sherrard, W.B. Yeats and the Search for Tradition (Ipswitch: Golgonooza Press, 1975), p. 19.
5. The locus classicus of such views is ch. 18, "Reality," of Richard Ellmann's W.B. Yeats: The Man and the Masks, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
6. T.R. Henn, "The Centenary Yeats," in Last Essays (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1976), p. 71.

and history, overcoming his natural dualism; and Daniel Albright has argued that the 1930s saw the decay of Yeats's millennial expectations into "a distinctly debased, humanized" version of the myth which accommodates "human recalcitrance."[1] Similarly, very different emphasis has been given by different writers to the use of sexual themes in Yeats's late work. Samuel Hynes argues that sex is the central metaphor for all creation in the later poems, Yeats's imagination having "become like a marriage bed, a coupling of male and female, a solved antinomy"; whereas Marjorie Perloff warns that such claims must be modified by the persistent transcendental thrust even in works like the "Crazy Jane" poems.[2]

Such a range of descriptions and emphases implies that we must be careful in examining Yeats's final period. Yeats's own self-description is never unambiguous, and he constantly anticipates and tests the shape of his experience -- writing, for example, a testament over twelve years before his death in "The Tower," and using in that poem images (the old man as "a sort of battered kettle at the heel," the "bird's sleepy cry" which signals the soul's flight) which anticipate those of his final poems. Similarly, Yeats tested the possibilities of old age. In an essay written in 1930 he uses Shakespeare as one model, whose "last words and closing scenes" (particularly those of Timon and Lear) "assert the soul's supremacy" (E 296). But only a page later in the same work, Yeats invokes a different model, reflecting the jokes, ballads, and bawdy of

1. Sherrard, pp. 14-15; Daniel Albright, The Myth Against Myth: A Study of Yeats's Imagination in Old Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 152-59. Albright's view is supported by a number of other writers, for example by Bloom, p. 420; by Helen Regueiro, The Limits of Imagination: Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 111-13; and Claire Hahn, "The Moral Centre of Yeats's Last Poems," Thought, 50 (1975), 301-11.
2. Samuel Hynes, "All the Wild Witches: The Women in Yeats's Poems," SR, 85 (1977), 582; Marjorie Perloff, "'Heart Mysteries': The Later Love Lyrics of W.B. Yeats," CL, 10 (1969), 267.

his late poems: "But I am now like that woman in Balzac who, after a rich marriage and association with the rich, made in her old age the jokes of the concierge's lodge where she was born." Neither of these two descriptions of a possible final period are, of course, "true" in any sense other than being metaphors for poetry, but such shifts in self-description can be useful clues to Yeats's late creativity. Indeed, for the late Yeats the primary reality is that of poetic experience in which things are born and die in the mind -- in which, in a memorable phrase, "The soul knows its changes of state alone" (A 471).

3.1 The Wisdom of Age

For all his life, Yeats imagined how it would be to be old. The theme of old age is one of the most recurrent in his work, the world "old" itself the second most frequent of those listed in the concordance (though not always, of course, in the context of old age).[1] His first work dealing with the subject is the dramatic poem "The Seeker," published when he was only twenty, and there follows a series of protagonists who are old, decrepit, weary, often mad or inspired: the "Sad Shepherd" with his "ancient burden," King Goll, the Old Fisherman in Crossways (1889); and, at the opening of what Yeats later considered his first real effort, the aged and weary hero of The Wanderings of Oisin (1889):

> S. Patrick. You who are bent, and bald, and blind,
> With a heavy heart and a wandering mind,
> Have known three centuries, poets sing,
> Of dalliance with a demon thing.

1. Stephen Maxfield Parrish and James Allan Painter, eds., A Concordance to the Poems of W.B. Yeats (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 935. "All" is the most frequent word of those listed.

> Oisin. Sad to remember, sick with years,
> The swift innumerable spears,
> The horsemen with their floating hair. . . . (VE 2)

Here, the old man is a figure of legend. As Oisin says, the tale "Must live to be old like the wandering moon." But these figures, present at the very beginning of Yeats's career, imply that there is a history of his attitude to old age.

It is possible to identify two broad strands in Yeats's thought about old age. In one, old age represents the coming of wisdom or, particularly in the early poems, the survival of ancient wisdom from a heroic age. An old peasant near Gort might possess the wisdom of ages; and Ireland herself had what Yeats called "an ancient imagination" (E&I 250). Old age could also represent the stilling of the turbulent passions of youth. Yeats wrote to Katherine Tynan in 1888 of his latest work: "it is not the poetry of knowledge, but of longing and complaint -- the cry of the heart against necessity. I hope some day to alter that and write poetry of insight and knowledge" (L 63). Later, looking back on his youthful frustrations, he wrote: "I did not discover that Hamlet had his self-possession from no schooling but from indifference and passion-conquering sweetness, and that less heroic minds can but hope it from old age" (A 94). The epitome of such wisdom was Shelley's ancient sage Ahasuerus, whom Yeats called one of his "touchstones."

There is, however, another model for old age, even in Yeats's early poetry; that of an old age which is not serene but marked by rage and wildness. Oisin wakes in an age in which Christianity has supplanted the heroic values, and his fury impells him towards his encounter with St. Patrick. The "Old Pensioner" contemplates time, then spits into its face. Such figures generate a feeling that all is lost, even that -- as

Yeats repeatedly put it -- all life is a preparation for something which never happens. Here, old age is not the acceptance of mutability, but an over-excited state in which loss is continually experienced anew. As such, it anticipates Yeats's late rage for disorder:

> if their neighbours figured plain,
> As though upon a lighted screen,
> No single story would they find
> Of an unbroken happy mind,
> A finish worthy of the start.
> Young men know nothing of this sort,
> Observant old men know it well;
> And when they know what old books tell,
> And that no better can be had,
> Know why an old man should be mad. (VE 626)

An oscillation between these two positions can be seen throughout Yeats's earlier work. In 1909 he meditates on Shakespeare at the end of his life seeking "wisdom in itself" (rather than in art's "passionate shadows").[1] But in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1918), the work which presages Yeats's mature period, the debate is darker in its implications. In a passage which anticipates his later concept of the "Body of Fate," Yeats suggests that "A Poet, when he is growing old, will ask himself if he cannot keep his mask and his vision without new bitterness, new disappointment." The picture of the bucolic old age of the sage which he has painted is shattered by that most potent image for the later Romantics, the old age of Wordsworth:

> He will perhaps buy some small house where, like Ariosto, he can dig his garden and think that in the return of birds and leaves, or moon and sun, and in the evening flight of the rooks he may discover rhythm and pattern like those in sleep and so never awake out of vision. Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust. (M 342)

The implication of the passage is that the poet must, as Yeats put it in the same work, sing amidst his uncertainty; he must continue not to make

1. W.B. Yeats, Memoirs, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 233.

peace with the "rhythm and pattern" of the natural life.

In the poems which follow Per Amica, we can see the beginnings of a more personal engagement with old age. The Wild Swans at Coole (1919) includes many poems which suggest a crisis of experience and (middle) age. The title poem is a good example, describing a return to Coole in which he remembers his youthful ardour: "And now my heart is sore. / All's changed . . ." (VE 322). In the ironically-titled "Men Improve with the Years" he depicts himself as a "weather-worn, marble triton / Among the streams" (VE 329). Images of spent passion recur throughout the volume, in the refrain of "A Song," for example: "O who could have foretold / That the heart grows cold?" (VE 334). The strongest expression of this mood, partly linked to events in Yeats's life in this period, is in the "Lines Written in Dejection" and "The Living Beauty." In the first of these, Yeats declares that his muses, "All the wild witches," have departed, along with the paraphernalia of heroism (after The Only Jealousy of Emer, completed in late 1918, Yeats abandoned two further projected Cuchulain plays).[1] His primary source is blighted, he claims in a figure which reverses that of Timon's "pale fire":

> Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
> And now that I have come to fifty years
> I must endure the timid sun. (VE 344)

In "The Living Beauty" he is even more explicit about what seems left to him at moments of pessimism:

> I bade, because the wick and oil are spent
> And frozen are the channels of the blood,
> My discontented heart to draw content
> From beauty that is cast out of a mould
> In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears,
> Appears, but when we have gone is gone again,
> Being more indifferent to our solitude
> Than 'twere an apparition. O heart, we are old;
> The living beauty is for younger men:
> We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears. (VE 333-34)

1. One on Cuchulain's death and another on the battle of the Ford (see the introduction to Fighting the Waves, quoted VP 568).

This is Yeats's equivalent of Wordsworth's "philosophical mind," an art which risk petrification. One pair of critics argue that the implication of this poem is that Yeats could not adjust to the coming of old age.[1] But he was only just beginning to make music out of such feelings. The intensity of the poem's rhetoric, even the use of the past tense to describe his disillusion, suggest that he has transcended the difficulties which it describes, and is moving towards a creative fury engendered by the passing of time. The poems which follow "The Living Beauty" reinforce that impression. They include a passionate appeal to Iseult Gonne, an attack on the dry scholarship of "Old, learned, respectable bald heads" (VE 337), and the poem which includes the couplet Yeats often used in signing presentation copies: "And wisdom is a butterfly / And not a gloomy bird of prey" (VE 338).

In the same volume, Yeats anticipates one "solution" which he had already implemented by the time the volume was published: marriage. In "On Woman" (written May 1914) he suggests, even more explicitly than in the later "Ego Dominus Tuus," that what he needs is a partner who would not be the distant and aging beauty which Maude Gonne had become; but instead a woman of genuine sexual energy, modelled on Sheba rather than Helen of Troy:

> God grant me -- no, not here,
> For I am not so bold
> To hope a thing so dear
> Now I am growing old,
> .....
> To find what once I had
> And know what once I have known,
> Until I am driven mad,
> Sleep driven from my bed,
> By tenderness and care,
> .....
> And live like Solomon
> That Sheba led a dance. (VE 346)

1. Gary and Linda Storhoff, "'A Mind of Winter': Yeats's Early Vision of Old Age," CLAJ, 21 (1977), 90-97.

This is a complex poem, mixing autobiography with occult thought. Yeats uses both the metaphors of rebirth which he was at that time developing in Per Amica, and (seemingly) a reference to his flesh-and-blood relationship with "Diana Vernon." Both these elements, as well as events in Ireland -- the Easter uprising, the end of his engagement with the Abbey Theatre -- were part of a renewal of Yeats's career in the years following 1916.[1]

As a result, old age became less of a "problem" for Yeats in the period up to The Tower (1928); though it is too extreme to suggest, as Jeffares almost does, that the topic was put aside for a decade.[2] In Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921) there are poems like "Under Saturn" in which Yeats accepts his Saturnian mood and celebrates the compensations of maturity. In "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" (1923) and in the Solomon and Sheba poems he describes the old poet drawing strength from a young bride. And in "Demon and Beast," another poem from Michael Robartes, he ascribes one of his rare moments of natural joy to old age:

> Yet I am certain as can be
> That every natural victory
> Belongs to beast or demon,
> That never yet had freeman
> Right mastery of natural things,
> And that mere growing old, that brings
> Chilled blood, this sweetness brought. . . .
>
> (VE 401)

This is not over-enthusiastic; but old age is at least allied to the daimonic, and in the lines that follow Yeats says that he wishes to prolong the vision. It must, as he implies in the poem's last stanza, be earned through a loss like St. Anthony's, a creative askesis.

Yeats continued to believe that there was an antithetical

1. On the role of Per Amica itself in this period, see Herbert J. Levine, Yeats's Daimonic Renewal (Ann Arbour, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983).
2. A. Norman Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 206-07.

relationship between imagination and the body -- that as the body weakens the imagination becomes fiercer. His own mind seemd to be doing so in the 1920s, as he followed the programme of hammering his thoughts into "unity" which he set out in the 1919 essay "If I were Four and Twenty." The work of the imagined Irish Academy which he described in that essay was to be his book, the occult knowledge stored on his file cards slowly condensing into A Vision. Yet as doing this, and being accorded public recognition in his Senatorship, the Nobel Prize, and other honours, he was also growing into the kind of old age which is epitomised by Oisin facing St. Patrick, in which his belief in an Anglo-Irish supremacy was increasingly out of tune with the prevailing Catholic culture. The contradiction which he had in a sense anticipated, between the old age of achieved wisdom and that of apocalyptic fury, thus sharpened as the decade advanced.

In The Tower (1928) old age and the passing of youth are again important themes which Yeats uses to generate energy. The balance of wisdom and fury in many of the poems is especially interesting. "The Tower" opens with the famous rhetorical protest: "O heart, O troubled heart -- this caricature, / Decrepit age that has been tied to me / As to a dog's tale?" (VE 409). The solution to old age in both the opening and closing sections of the poem is an abstract wisdom ("Plato and Plotinus") like that described in section III, the poetic "Will." But to many readers that wisdom and its iteration seem mechanical, almost the residue of imaginative failure.[1] What generate real energy are the images of heroic failure which Yeats contemplates in section II: Mrs French, the blind old man, Hanrahan. Yeats's treatment of the latter is particularly complex. In section II he describes Hanrahan's "horrible splendour of desire," but he also recalls his failure (as it is described in The

1. See, for example, Bloom, Yeats, pp. 351-52.

Secret Rose) in his encounter with the temptress Echtge:

> Hanrahan rose in frenzy there
> And followed those baying creatures towards --
>
> O towards I have forgotten what -- enough!
>
> (VE 412)

This is one of those characteristic moments of textual hesitation in which Yeats approaches an unspeakable truth, and sees himself fail.[1] It is, therefore, curious that he should invoke Hanrahan and Hanrahan's "mighty memories" near the end of section II, at the point where Yeats claims that he has "found an answer in those eyes / That are impatient to be gone," that is in death and the dead, and the wisdom of A Vision. Even more curiously, this is the point where Yeats recalls his own failure and wishes to expunge it: "if memory recur, the sun's / Under eclipse and the day blotted out." "The Tower" is a difficult and perhaps inexplicable poem, but what is suggested by Yeats's treatment of Hanrahan is a tension between apocalyptic wisdom -- associated with failure, death, and purgation -- and the wisdom of the "learned school." There is also a tension between memory and forgetting; and between the past audience which he invokes and the future one which the "will" presupposes -- something which I will explore in later sections.

A contrast between two versions of the wisdom of age is visible elsewhere in The Tower. In the conclusion to "Meditations in Time of Civil War" Yeats writes that, despite the "senseless tumult" around him, "The abstract joy, / The half-read wisdom of daemonic images, / Suffice the aging man as once the growing boy" (VE 427). In the poem that follows this one the same image is repeated, but with a different emphasis. The mood of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" is fiercer, and

1. David Lynch provides an analysis of such moments in his Yeats: The Poetics of the Self (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 18, 45-46 et passim, linking them to the poet's relationship to his mother, and women in general.

the continuity of "Meditations" is discredited:[1]

> He who can read the signs nor sink unmanned
> Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant
> From shallow wits; who knows no work can stand,
> Whether health, wealth or peace of mind were spent
> On master-work of intellect or hand,
> No honour leave its mighty monument,
> Has but one comfort left: all triumph would
> But break upon his ghostly solitude. (VE 429)

It is the destruction of art that is imagined here, and in this poem there is a radically different attitude to the "half-read images":

> The swan has leaped into the desolate heaven:
> That image can bring wildness, bring a rage
> To end all things, to end
> What my laborious life imagined, even
> The half-imagined, the half-written page. . . . (VE 431)

The poem in which Yeats most publicly celebrates his wisdom is, however, the one which he used to end both A Vision and The Tower. "All Souls' Night" depicts the process of refinement described in the poem's master-image of the glass of mature wine, fit only for the dead who "drink from the wine-breath / While our gross palates drink from the whole wine." The three of his dead who Yeats calls up to witness his achievements are all solitary figures who pursue their own path to wisdom -- Horton purifying his "platonic love," Florence Emery growing old in Ceylon while studying Indian doctrine, and MacGregor with his self-inflicted frenzy. Horton, in particular, was a central figure in the genesis of A Vision.[2] All of them can be seen as manifesting the "enforced loss" and "simplification through intensity" which are characteristic of what is (usually) see as Yeats's own phase in A Vision, seventeen[3]. Arguably, there is another failure from phase seventeen also

1. The first poem was, of course, written four years after the poem which Yeats used to follow it in The Tower. But it is typical of Yeats that he should choose such an ordering: see pp. 256-66 below.
2. See A Critical Edition of Yeats's A Vision (1925), ed. George Mills Harper and Walter Kelly Hood (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. xii-xvi.
3. Harold Bloom, Yeats, p. 370, describes all three as "archetypes of the failed artist," like Childe Roland. A dissenting opinion on Yeats's phase is provided by Allen, "From Puzzle to Paradox," p. 88.

present: Shelley, who had according to Yeats also burnt himself out in the pursuit of false goals.[1] But, as Yeats says in his poem, "names are nothing." What is important is that Yeats should link his own achieved wisdom with the failure of these witnesses; with their self-destructive journeys into death.

The irony of "All Souls' Night" is that Yeats, being alive, cannot himself be said to have achieved that deathly wisdom: the "gross palates" of the living drink from the "whole wine." As I will show, he did not regard the wisdom of A Vision (1925) as sufficiently realized. A number of changes, in fact, seem to have come over him between 1926 and 1929, a period which is commonly seen as one of crisis for him. The changes involve many elements, including his lifestyle (he gave up his Senatorship, Thoor Ballylee, and his settled existence in Dublin); his health (a series of illnesses beginning in 1927); and especially his work: a move away from the public philosophical style of the "Tower" poems towards the intense and fragmentary later lyrics. Daniel Albright argues that the end of this period sees Yeats's awareness of the illusory nature of his millennial expectations; and Paul de Man, in a complementary study, suggests that Yeats's relation to "the emblem" as the container of truth changed. Poems like "Her Vision in the Wood" mark "a decisive shift from the realm of the emblem back to that of the natural image," and the reader enters "a world of cold terror and strident dissonance."[2] There were long periods without poetry -- much of 1928 -- but the period

1. The reference to a "slight companionable ghost" is interesting in this respect, and the metaphor of the foaming cup recalls Yeats's essay on Shelley (E&I 89). The poem's reference to whirling moons could also be seen to recall the final section of Prometheus Unbound; and the dance of the blessed and damned described in the poem's final stanza is reminiscent of "The Triumph of Life" as well as other sources.
2. Albright, pp. 154-55; Paul de Man, "Image and Emblem in Yeats," in his The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 237, 189.

of reassessment as a whole could be seen as climaxing in the lyrics which Yeats wrote in his few "exultant weeks" at Rapallo in early 1929 (VE 831). Years later, writing to Edmund Dulac in December 1934 about the genesis of the "blood symbolism" of A Full Moon in March, Yeats recalled this period:

> You may be right about The Full Moon in March but I am not sure. I thought you would say what you have said, for I have been working at something opposed to the clear, bright dry air of your genius. I do not understand why this blood symbolism laid hold on me but I must work it out. If I had a volume of my poems I could show you when it began about six years ago. Such things come from beyond the will, they exhaust themselves and the mind turns to some opposite. (L 830)

I will discuss this late period defined by Yeats in the section which follows.

3.1.1 Late Yeats

In Yeats's later work, his expressed attitude to wisdom remained in many ways the same. Time after time in the last ten years of his life he reported to friends that he was on the point of writing a different kind of poetry. In 1924 he wrote to his peculiarly learned philosophical correspondent Frank Pearce Sturm: "sooner or later I shall have to pluck certain brands from the bonfire and announce the poetry of belief."[1] This "poetry of belief" is, as I have suggested, equivocally involved in poems like "The Tower," and in the project of A Vision. In 1928 he wrote to another correspondent that he could now "find some measure of sweetness and light, as befits old age," adding a day later that he was ready to write his "most amiable verses" (L 737, 739). What eventually came were the entirely unamiable Crazy Jane poems. In March 1929 he

1. Letter to Sturm, 3 July 1924. In Frank Pearce Sturm: His Life, Letters, and Collected Work, ed. Richard Taylor (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 81.

reported:

> I feel like one of those Japanese who in the middle ages retired from the world . . . to devote himself "to art and letters" which was considered sacred. If this new work do not seem as good as the old to my friends then I can take on some lesser task and live very contentedly. (L 761)

The phrase "some lesser task" recalls the "some small house" of sterile contentment in Per Amica Silentia Lunae; an option Yeats does not intend to pursue. In fact, as he entered his mid-sixties, Yeats's poetic practice was shifting him away from the "ideal" version of old age.

The poems in which Yeats can be seen adjusting his attitude to old age are the three sequences which he wrote in the period between 1926 and 1931, "A Woman Young and Old," "A Man Young and Old," and "Words for Music Perhaps"; as well as in a number of other poems dealing with the chronology of his life, "Among School Children" and the later "Vacillation" in particular.[1] There is detectable in Yeats's letters soon after the publication of A Vision (1925) a concern with old age which was not earlier apparent. Yeats begins to comment on his age, to reflect on his youth, to quote drafts of his poems and sequences on the subject. "I suppose to grow old is to grow impersonal, to need nothing and seek nothing for oneself -- at least it may be thus," he wrote in 1926, with characteristic equivocation (L 715). In his letters of the next two years he expatiates in particular on the wild regrets and the memories of love of an old man or woman, as he was describing them in the poems, seeking an "impersonal" view of the subject.

Both of the "Young and Old" sequences trace a progression from early desire to what could be described as a middle-aged preoccupation with the

1. The chronology here is complex. Yeats began the sequences in early 1926, and published "A Man Young and Old" in The Tower in 1928. "A Woman Young and Old" was first published in The Winding Stair (New York: Fountain Press, 1929). The Crazy Jane poems were begun in early 1929, finished late 1931.

symbol, and then a late "wildness." Yeats wrote of them in a letter of December 1926 to Olivia Shakespeare, emphasizing the role of disillusion in old age:

> I told you and showed you part of two series of poems in which a man and a woman in old or later life remember love. I am writing for each series contrasting poems of youth. . . . I think it likely that there will be yet another series upon the old man and his soul as he slowly comes to understand that the mountains are not solid, that all he sees is a mathematical line drawn between hope and memory. (L 720)

In "A Man Young and Old" the early lyrics recall Yeats's early loves; but the fifth song, "The Empty Cup" (a draft of which was included in a letter of 6 December 1926) alludes to the brimming cup of "All Souls' Night";[1]

> October last I found it too
> But found it dry as bone,
> And for that reason am I crazed
> And my sleep is gone. (VE 454)

This is the familiar apocalyptic mode: frustration fuels the poet, just as in the poems which follow, the depredations of time create various states of hilarity, terror, and ecstasy. In some, like "The Friends of His Youth," Yeats mocks his previous beliefs and (implicitly) his naivete. In others, old age brings a fresh hauteur: the penultimate poem of "A Woman Young and Old" depicts two former lovers meeting in old age and scorning each other in their pride. In general, old age as it is portrayed in these sequences is a time of fragmentary rather than serene and synoptic memory, of apocalyptic fury, and of sexual knowledge (of the latter, more below) rather than of wisdom.

1. Cf. Yeats's letter of Feb. 21 of the same year: "One never tires of life and at the last must die of thirst with the cup at one's lip" (L 711).

Both of the "Young and Old" sequences end with poems which are translations from the Greek, suggesting that Yeats was searching for literary models for final experience; or perhaps attempting to indicate the universality of old age and death. But in fact the two loose translations set up a complex relationship between "life" and "literature." "From the 'Antigone,'" which ends "A Woman Young and Old," celebrates love as a power in the drama of history, so that "Family and family, / City and city may contend, / By that great glory driven wild" (VE 540). But as David R. Clark has pointed out, the three lines which follow and end the poem move from the Dionysiac in history to a human lament for its cost.[1] In this, the poem mirrors some of Yeats's own feelings about his own historical drama, as they are expressed in the plays and poems of the 1930s. "From 'Oedipus at Colonus,'" the lyric from his own translation which Yeats placed at the end of "A Man Young and Old," is even more interesting. Yeats translated Oedipus at Colonus in the period 1926-1927, and seemed to have gained from it a fresh impetus and energy. He wrote to Olivia Shakespeare: "My work on Oedipus at Colonus has made me bolder and when I look at King Oedipus I am shocked at my moderation. I want to be less literal and more idiomatic and modern" (L 721). He commented on this tendency to feed off his own art in a famous letter of 1928: "Do you suppose for one moment that Shakespeare educated Hamlet and King Lear by telling them what he thought and believed? As I see it, Hamlet and Lear educated Shakespeare . . ." (L 741). Oedipus at Colonus could be said to have been part of Yeats's education, and the construction of a self appropriate to old age. The treatment of the Oedipus theme is revealing. Clark compares both the choruses mentioned above with their sources in Yeats's working texts, in

1. David R. Clark, Yeats at Songs and Choruses (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), pp. 228-29, 242.

particular Richard Jebb's translation.[1] In the drafts of "From 'Oedipus at Colonus,'" Yeats reproduced from his sources the image of the old man as a rock battered by the wind (an image which Hardy found fascinating). But even in working out that idea, Yeats "emptied out" the image, emphasizing not resilience, but the "nothingness" of the old man. I quote one draft version:

> I am an aged man, Oedipus aged that is to say
> A sort of no mans land under the north that is
> storm beaten night and day
> A sort of nothing where the winds of heaven play.[2]

This is some distance from the original: Yeats depicts the old man as half with the dead, already a phantom.[3] In the final version of the chorus, the storm-washed rock drops out of sight altogether, to be replaced by the central metaphor of the death-bed/marriage-bed: "I celebrate the silent kiss that ends short life or long" (VE 459/VP 887). Passion and the celebration of sex and death replaces endurance.

As Clark indicates, Yeats amends and embellishes (rather than condensing) his sources most liberally in the choruses. But throughout his translation, Yeats does emphasize the fact that the aged Oedipus has not simply survived into old age. Rather, he has been separated from his early life by schism. He says early in the play, addressing the Furies:

> Dear daughters of ancient darkness, and Athens, most honoured among cities, have mercy upon this ghost of Oedipus, upon this ghost, for the man Oedipus is dead, the man men knew. (VP 855)

Oedipus dwells in an after-time in which he is a shadow of the actor who appeared in the earlier play; "Set me apart from these acts [of parricide, incest and misery]" he cries, pointing out that the gods have caused everything that has happened (VP 881). His present existence is a purgatory in which he counts the cost of his own story. Consider, for

1. Ibid., chs. 5-7.
2. Ibid., p. 188.
3. Yeats himself called part of his translation of the chorus "very bad Grecian but very good Elizabethan" (L 723).

example, the point at which Oedipus speaks of his crimes in response to Creon's prodding. In Jebb's version Oedipus is indignant: "for verily I will not be silent when thou has gone so far in impious speech."[1] In Yeats's reshaping of the dialogue, the accent is placed subtly on the purgative role of such speech:

> Are you not ashamed to have spoken of my mother, and to make me speak of my marriage with her, seeing that she was your own sister? You drive me to shameless speech and speak I must, whether I will or no -- Misery! Misery! (VP 881)

This speech is echoed in "From the 'Antigone,'" which deals with the afterlife of Oedipus's drama:

> Pray I will and sing I must,
> And yet I weep -- Oedipus' child
> Descends into the loveless dust. (VE 540)

The poet in these lyrics and speeches thus shifts his emphasis from the huge and god-driven plots of the earlier Oedipus play to a more human drama in which the old Oedipus and his daughter face death. The "literature" which ends the two "Young and Old" sequences implies a movement <u>out</u> of literature, into song.

The other sequence of these years, "Words for Music Perhaps," has a poem which explicitly celebrates what Yeats calls

> the supreme theme of Art and Song:
> Bodily decrepitude is wisdom; young
> We loved each other and were ignorant. (VE 523)

"After Long Silence" celebrates, as Clark demonstrates, not wisdom or love so much as the testing of both in old age.[2] The poem is shadowed by the death of "All other lovers" (it is, Clark shows, connected to "All Souls' Night" with that poem's similar list of the dead). The poem could thus almost be called a momentary lull in the creative disaster of old

1. <u>Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments</u>, Part II, <u>The Oedipus Coloneus</u>, trans. Richard Jebb, 3rd. ed. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1900), p. 157. In this text, the "O Misery!" is parenthetical.
2. See his "After 'Silence,' the 'Supreme Theme': Eight Lines of Yeats," in <u>Yeats at Songs and Choruses</u>, pp. 65-89.

age, an assessment of its losses and gains. The poem which follows it is more typical of Yeats's actual portrayal of old age in the Crazy Jane poems:

> You ask what makes me sigh, old friend,
> What makes me shudder so?
> I shudder and I sigh to think
> That even Cicero
> And many-minded Homer were
> Mad as the mist and snow. (VE 524)

The sequence ends with the erotic transformation of the Classical sages in "The Dephic Oracle upon Plotinus," and with the rejection of the wisdom of the "winding-sheet" in "Old Tom Again": "Things out of perfection sail, / And all their swelling canvas wear, / Nor shall the self-begotten fail" (VE 530). Emphasis is thus placed on a continual re-creation of self rather than "wisdom" as Yeats had conceived it.

It is at this point that my account intersects, more or less, with what could be called the standard version of Yeats's last phase. As Jeffares points out, Yeats in his later verse does all that he can to avoid the "dryness" which he associated, perhaps, with Nietzsche's description of old age in The Dawn of Day.[1] In 1936 he described Edith Cooper as "a dry, precise, precious, pious, finicking old maid" until she "found a new character, a second youth" (E&I 496). In poems like "A Prayer for Old Age" he calls for a similar "new character" in himself:

> I pray -- for fashion's word is out
> And prayer comes round again --
> That I may seem, though I die old,
> A foolish, passionate man. (VE 553)

"Wisdom" remains a possibility in Yeats's later works, but one which is rejected. In poems like "Vacillation" the dialogue of saint and heathen is philosophical. In those poems written "in the mask," the rejection is even more violent. Consider for example "The Wild Old Wicked Man":

1. Jeffares, W.B. Yeats: Man and Poet, pp. 294-95.

"That some stream of lightning
From the old man in the skies
Can burn out that suffering
No right-taught man denies.
But a coarse old man am I,
I choose the second-best,
I forget it all awhile
Upon a woman's breast." (VE 589-90)

In his late ballads, and in poems like "The Spur," Yeats celebrates coarseness and candor in a way which seems unparalleled in English poetry. The declaration that "lust and rage" are his themes are, of course, rhetoric; but that is itself a recognition that rhetoric, in the sense of material for poetry, is more important than the wisdom which he had hoped for:

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,
I must be satisfied with my heart. . . . (VE 629)

As he puts it is "A Prayer for Old Age," "O what am I that I should not seem / For the song's sake a fool?" To write on is all-important.

Thus, the old age to which Yeats finally came was not that of wisdom and contentment, but that other alternative which he had predicted: a turbulent and deliberately shocking re-creation of self in which Yeats makes himself the object of his own apocalyptic thought. "We have all," he wrote in 1936, "something within ourselves to batter down and get our power from this fighting. I have never produced a play in verse without showing the actors that the passion of the verse comes from the fact that the speakers are holding down violence or madness."[1] There is little of "wisdom" in this, but a good deal of understanding of his own creativity. "Wisdom" belongs to an old age which never arrives, at the end of a process which is never completed. The closing passage of Yeats's 1900 essay on Shelley could, though Yeats might have resisted the

1. Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 94.

suggestion, have been applied to its author:

> there is for every man some one scene, some one adventure, some one picture that is the image of his secret life, for wisdom first speaks in images, and that this one image, if he would but brood over it his life long, would lead his soul, disentangled from unmeaning circumstance and the ebb and flow of the world, into that far household where the undying gods await all whose souls have become simple as flame, whose bodies have become quiet as an agate lamp.
>
> But he was born in a day when the old wisdom had vanished and was content merely to write verses, and often with little thought of more than verses. (E&I 95)

The dialectic of "wisdom" and "poetry," focussed so often on the topic of old age, is a vital element in Yeats's poetry, and his late career can be seen as a continual failure to live up to the expectations of an idealized last phase.

3.1.2 A Vision and the Deferment of Wisdom

As I have already suggested, Yeats in his later life often said that he was on the point of a new kind of poetry, the poetry of old age and wisdom. But as I argued, he often rejected such an achieved state. Nowhere is his double-edged attitude more visible than it is in his relationship with the pivotal work of his late career, and the clearest expression of his "wisdom," A Vision.

A Vision accompanied Yeats throughout most of his mature career, and served as the source of a number of ideas that can be seen in later poems and essays. But despite its official genesis in his wife's automatic writing (which began in September 1917), the ideas it contains can be traced back to the occult tradition which he explored in the 1890s, and many of its terms, as well as a concern to systematize his thought, can

be seen developing in Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1918).[1] Even its narrative framework -- the Robartes stories -- has its origins in the 1890s. The material it contains was "delivered" at a series of sessions over the period 1917-23, but as the editors of the recent edition of its first version point out, Yeats began to organize the material according to his own principles within a few months of the first session.[2] The imprint of his ideas, the autobiographical material it contains, and the aesthetic metaphors it generates, all point to its role as a summa: a synthesis of all the poet has learnt about himself, life, and poetry.

Despite this obvious centrality to Yeats's development, its importance was carefully qualified when it was published in a limited edition -- mainly for friends and fellow-adepts -- in 1925. The Robartes stories "explain," in an ironic fashion, its origin, and create an uncertainty about what kind of authority it has. The tensions involved are best described by Yeats himself, in a note which he wrote on completing the work, explaining how it serves an intensely private (and purgative) role, but also provides a truth which receives its validation from external sources:

> Something that has troubled my life for years has been folded up & smoothed out & laid away [replaced by "been taken and set in order" in typescript]; & yet I declare that I have not invented one detail of this system, that alone has made it possible that I may end my life without lacking an emotion or emphasis on my [purity?].[3]

Yeats provided a more factual version of the work's compositional

1. On this subject, see in particular Morton Irving Sieden's William Butler Yeats: The Poet as Mythmaker (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1962); George Mills Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn (London: Macmillan, 1974), ch. 9 and epilogue; and Graham Hough's recent The Mystery Religion of W.B. Yeats (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984), chs. 1 & 2.
2. A Critical Edition, pp. xxix-xxxvi.
3. Ibid., p. xliv.

history when he came to write the second version.[1] He also explained the reason for his beginning to write so early in the process which produced it, saying "I was told that I must write, that I must seize the moment between ripe and rotten -- there was a metaphor of apples about to fall and just fallen" (AV 18). Little could better express the peculiar position of wisdom in Yeats's writing: knowledge has come, yet it is still about to come; it hovers in an area of indeterminate authority. It would in fact be possible, as more than one critic has suggested, to propose an ironic or "comic" reading of A Vision which emphasizes the way in which Yeats employs doubt and self-parody, especially in the tissue of supporting tales and diagrams.

In fact Yeats quickly repudiated the first version of A Vision, saying that it left important areas untouched, and that his understanding of the sacred geometry which it contains was flawed: he declared that he had been unripe.[2] He began to re-write it quickly, and continued to do so for the rest of his life. The re-written version is different from the 1925 edition in many important details, and is, in general, better-organized and more coherent, particularly in its presentation of history (the sections dealing with the individual are least altered).[3] I do not intend to analyse the changes between the two volumes. What is of particular interest, however, is the way that the rewriting of A Vision reflects Yeats's attitude to wisdom, beginning with the publication of

1. In 1932 Yeats published an "amended version" of Stories of Michael Robartes and His Friends, later AV 31-55. Part of the shift in emphasis away from the supporting framework towards a historical analysis can be seen in the short pieces later published as "Michael Robartes: Two Occult Manuscripts," in Yeats and the Occult, ed. George Mill Harper (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 204-24.
2. See Yeats's introduction, AV 19; and A Critical Edition, pp. xii-xiii.
3. On the actual differences between the two versions, see especially the chapter on "The Myth Revised," Seiden, pp. 103-27; Rosemary Puglia Ritvo, "A Vision B: the Plotinian Metaphysical Basis," RES, 26 (1975), 34-46; and for a succinct though rather biased summary, Hough, pp. 97-98.

the first version in January 1926.[1]

Yeats seems to have begun revision of A Vision almost as soon as it was published; he wished to perfect it and republish "in three years."[2] He was doing so in 1927, and in 1928 took it with him to Rapallo (L 730, 742). He re-wrote the introduction there (including "A Packet for Ezra Pound"), saying that "All that is laborious or mechanical in my book is finished; what remains can be added as a momentary rest from writing verse" (AV 7).[3] At that point he envisaged completing it in 1929. In 1929 he was still working on it, and in comments to a number of correspondents he indicated that he hoped to publish in spring of the following year.[4] In February 1931, he reported "I have really finished A Vision -- I turn over the pages and find nothing to add" (L 781). In November 1931 Yeats told a correspondent that he had had a semi-mystical experience walking in the woods near Coole, seeing the book whole, so that he could return to verse (L 785-88). But he was still making additions, and one and a half years later he was still working on drafts related to it, claiming that it was really finished (L 812-13). In January 1934 he wrote: "Five years would be about long enough to finish my autobiography and bring out A Vision" (L 818) -- a remarkably accurate prediction. At that point he again said "the book is done," apart from its diagrams (L 819); and he informed his publisher that it was ready.[5]

At this point, a number of publication delays intervened. It was, as Finneran shows, late 1934 before the manuscript was delivered to Macmillan; and there were extensive delays in proofreading, revision,

1. The book appeared with its title page dated 1925. My account at this point and subsequently draws on Richard J. Finneran, "On Editing Yeats: The Text of A Vision (1937)," TSLL, 19 (1977), 119-34.
2. Letter to Sturm, 28 Jan. 1926. Sturm, p. 93.
3. A Packet for Ezra Pound was first published in 1929.
4. Sturm, p. 100; L 768; and the letters to Sturge Moore and Masefield quoted by Finneran, "On Editing Yeats," p. 120.
5. On 9 March 1934. See Finneran, "On Editing Yeats," p. 120.

consultation with Frank Pearce Sturm, and Yeats's ill health -- as well as Yeats's work on other projects, especially the translation of the Upanishads which he was preparing with Shri Purohit Swami.[1] Yeats finally saw it to the press in early 1937, writing to Edith Shackleton Heald "This book is the skeleton in my cupboard. I do not know whether I want my friends to see it or not to see it" (L 888). On 7 October 1937 it was published. In 1938, now in the last year of his life, he complained mildly of the reviewers who wanted him to explain himself to them, and referred to it unequivocally as a work of art in which "intensity is all" (L 905).[2] In a final reference to A Vision he called it "my public philosophy," setting it apart from the "private philosophy" of which he said: "I have not published it because I only half understand it" -- though some of the private philosophy, he added in a later letter, had got into his final play The Death of Cuchulain (L 916, 917).

Two further letters can be used to round this saga off. In December 1938 he wrote "Am I a mystic? -- no, I am a practical man" (L 921). In January 1939, in the last of the Letters, he wrote movingly:

> I know for certain that my time will not be long. I have put away everything that can be put away that I may speak what I have to speak, and I find "expression" is a part of "study." In two or three weeks . . . I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and the arrangement of thought which I am convinced will complete my studies. (L 922)

"In two or three weeks" he was dead. The "fundamental thoughts" were never, according to this pronouncement, fully expressed, despite Yeats devoting so much of his time, from 1932 onwards, to the task he described as "writing philosophical essays for the most part, finishing what would otherwise be unfinished."[3]

1. See Finneran, "On Editing Yeats," pp. 120-21; Sturm, p. 105.
2. "Purification through intensity" was the Mask of phase 17, Yeats's putative phase, in A Vision.
3. Letter to Sturm, 7 March 1934. Sturm, p. 103.

A recapitulation of the progression which I have traced can be seen in the differences between the two conclusions which Yeats wrote for the 1925 and 1937 versions. In the former (retained in the text of 1937, but supplemented) he writes:

> I think of famous works where synthesis has been carried to the utmost limit possible, and I notice that when the limit is approached or past, when the new gyre begins to stir, I am filled with excitement. I can recognise that the limit itself has become a new dimension. (AV 300)

The later conclusion, dated 1934-1936 in the text, focusses on the failure of such millennial hopes. Yeats had complained of the first version that he has written "nothing about the Beatific Vision, little of sexual love." The latter is an important part of his poetry between the two editions of A Vision; the former he had largely abandoned as a topic. In the second conclusion he writes of his attempt to find "everything in the symbol";

> But nothing comes -- though this moment was to reward me for all my toil. Perhaps I am too old. Surely something would have come when I meditated under the direction of the Cabalists. . . . Then I understand. I have already said all that can be said. The particulars are the work of the Thirteenth Cone or cycle which is in every man and called by every man his freedom. (AV 301-02)

The "Thirteenth Cone" will keep the secret. The final wisdom does not come, and as Yeats said in the last of the Letters, it can be embodied, but it cannot be known.

I have, perhaps, over-simplified a story which involves a number of other accidents, people, and causes. But Yeats's attitude to the rewriting of A Vision does illustrate a difficulty over the achievement of final form. His true philosophy is always hidden, always just over the horizon. Truth is liminal, deferred, and finally "embodied" in the drama of self rather than known; while poetry is a product of the disappointment of expectations as much as their fulfillment.

3.2 Topics of Old Age

In introducing this section, I will consider briefly what I have called the "two bodies" of the poet as they are apparent in Yeats's work -- particularly the dialogue, late in his career, between the public and private roles of the poet. In the topical analysis which follows, the working out of the conflict between public and private selves, or between achievement (the poet's corpus) and energy (the act of writing) will be considered in three closely-related topics which together form an important part of Yeats's late creativity: statuary, the severed head, and sexuality. I will argue that there is discernible in the way in which Yeats treats these topics a mode of thought which can be called "apocalyptic" -- though the "annunciation" is, often, a better focus for it. Yeats deploys such thought, often consciously, in order to restore his poetic energy, just as in 1934 he underwent the Steinach operation in order to restore his animal spirits.[1] Such moments of revivification often entail elements of Yeats's millenial thought as it is developed in A Vision. One passage, in particular, serves as a prolegomena to the themes of this section:

> A millennium is the symbolic measure of a being that attains its flexible maturity and then sinks into rigid age.
>
> A civilization is a struggle to keep self-control, and in this it is like some great tragic person, some Niobe who must display an almost superhuman will or the cry will not touch our sympathy. The loss of control over thought comes toward the end; first a sinking in upon the moral being, then the last surrender, the irrational cry, revelation -- the scream of Juno's peacock. (AV 268)

Arguably, this is a model of Yeats's relationship with his own art: he is the (Irish) civilization incarnate who has attained a "flexible maturity" and risks sinking into "rigid age." The loss of "self-control"

1. For an account of effects of this operation on Yeats's sexuality and work, see Richard Ellmann, W.B. Yeats's Second Puberty (Washington: Library of Congress, 1985).

is not so much personal as projected onto his imagination -- his own muse-principle -- in order that the "irrational cry, revelation" may be celebrated. Apocalyptic thought is both appropriate to old age, and a source of final strength.

3.2.1 The Two Selves of the Poet: Public and Private in Yeats

As Harold Bloom has remarked, Yeats is a poet for whom the relationship of the poet to his own vision is of fundamental interest. The theory of the mask is an important part of the way in which Yeats conceived his own creativity, and the nature of his self as a poet.[1] The "mask" is also the public aspect of the poet. It is possible to trace in Yeats's career a developing relationship between the public and private roles of the poet, and between a different but related pair of entities, the poet and the man: divisions which have been central to many works on Yeats which examine the "man and poet" or "man and masks."

Yeats had a number of images for what I have called the "two bodies" of the writer. One is the image of the two Heracleses which he derived from Morris's Homer, one of whom is a shade and "walks through the darkness," and the other of whom is the hero amidst the immortal gods, "he that has for his bride Hebe, 'The Daughter of Zeus /the mighty/ and Hera shod with gold'" (AV 302).[2] Yeats had other versions of this figure. That of the abandoned Christ whom he describes Wilde as inventing, living on after his crucifixion (A 136-37), seems to have

1. Bloom, Yeats, p. 457. The role of Yeats's theory of the mask in his self-perception is explained most clearly, I believe, in Robert Langbaum's The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
2. See also E 330. Kathleen Raine provides an analysis of the source of Hercules's image in the occult tradition in Death in Life and Life in Death: "Cuchulain Comforted" and "News from the Delphic Oracle," New Yeats Papers, VIII (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1974), p. 28.

impressed him; he included Edwin Ellis's poem on the same theme in The Oxford Book of Modern Verse.[1] Much of this theory in A Vision is concerned with the relationship between what could be called the merely human, the primary, and that which can be associated with art and creativity, the antithetical. The theory of the mask is similarly dependent on the establishment of an artificial self which is more real than the everyday self, driving it to extremes and reducing it to the status of a ghostly double, like Heracles's abandoned human shade:

> They [the daimons] have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle that he may confront without despair. They contributed Dante's banishment, they snatched away his Beatrice, and thrust Villon into the arms of harlots. . . . [that they] might through passion become conjoint to their buried selves, turn all into Mask and Image, and so be phantoms in their own eyes. (A 272-73)

By the middle 1920 Yeats had fashioned, to an extent that he had probably never thought possible, his own mask. As Robert Langbaum puts it, "He had established by then the public legend to which he could allude in his poetry -- the legend of the poet champion of Ireland, disappointed lover of Ireland's beautiful heroine, friend of the model aristocrat Lady Gregory, and owner of the Tower where he revived the ancient life of Ireland and explored occult mysteries."[2] Yet there existed behind the mask of the "sixty-year old smiling public man" a certain amount of doubt, both about his public role and about his own creativity. In poems like "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" he contrasts "triumph" with the "solitude" that it mars, and both here and elsewhere mocks the emptiness of achievement. For the poet who had described

1. The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, ed. W.B. Yeats (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 27. Ellis's own case seems poignant in the context of his poem about fame and obscure survival: Yeats could not locate his literary executors by the time he came to edit the Oxford anthology. The same story of a human Christ lingering on after his mythical death and resurrection forms the basis of George Moore's The Brook Kerith (London: William Heinemann, 1916) and other works of the period.
2. Langbaum, p. 185.

"enforced loss" as the source of his creativity, public recognition may be rewarding, but is deeply problematic.

After the publication of The Tower, a new image enters Yeats's work: that of the poet whose doubt has emptied out his perception of his public role to such an extent that the public self seems like a doppleganger. "Mask" in Yeats's later work can seem potentially dangerous, capable of trapping the poet in a parody of his own public face. "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" meditates on:

> The finished man among his enemies?--
> How in the name of Heaven can he escape
> That defiling and disfiguring shape
> The mirror of malicious eyes
> Casts upon his eyes until at last
> He thinks that shape must be his shape?
> And what's the good of an escape
> If honour find him in the wintry blast? (VE 479)

The most compelling image for the poet's burnt-out shell in the late poetry is the skeletal form: the "old clothes upon old sticks" of "Among School Children," the nightmarish coat-hanger of "The Apparitions." In the former the poet has become neglected by the "careless muse," reduced to being a "comfortable kind of old scare-crow"; while in the second the vision of the coat-hanger moving across the room, absurd in itself, is an intimation of the terror of death and the flight of the soul from its bodily "clothing."

It is interesting to compare these figures with the more prosaic account of fame in Yeats's Nobel Prize essay, "The Bounty of Sweden" (1923). Yeats reflects that the poet's work escapes him; a fact even more necessarily true for a poet who, like Yeats, could not remember or even at times understand his earlier work. He comments that he feels most at ease with his "public" achievements -- lecturing and essay-writing -- while his poetry has a more ambiguous relation to its

creator:

> I print the poem and never hear about it again, until I find the book years after with a page dog-eared by some young man, or marked by some young girl with a violet, and when I have seen that, I am a little ashamed, as though somebody were to attribute to me a delicacy of feeling I should but do not possess. What came so easily at first, and amidst so much drama, and was written so laboriously at the last, cannot be accounted among my possessions. (A 533)

The "markings" of the reader are in this account the real inscriptions; the poet cannot be equated with what he writes. The essay as it progresses deepens the division between poet and audience, and questions all public recognition outside the privileged sphere of the idealized Swedish court. In a savage paragraph, Yeats describes "some equivalent gathering" in a realized democratic state, full of writers of "that age where an English novelist becomes eligible for the Order of Merit" (perhaps thinking of Hardy), where the young are bored and resentful, while the old display "the trophies won in their life of struggle" (A 546). The word "trophies" is resonant here, for instead of being elevated among the muse's "cloudy trophies," these old poets are empty shells. They have sold themselves, as the Yeats of 1915 had refused to do, for a ribbon.[1] There is a strong vein of irony, some of it aimed at the author, throughout this "bread and butter" letter to the Nobel Committee (L 701, 703). Its source is largely in the divide between public and private poet, between solitude and performance.

The disillusion which Yeats felt at the public poet is expressed in his late verse in satirical (and often slight) verses on the "Laureate" and "Statesman." The hero cannot be publicly celebrated, except in the self-consciously anachronistic ballad-forms with which he praises the

1. In a letter to his sister in December 1915 Yeats reported that he had turned down a possible knighthood because it would compromise his friendships in Ireland: "I do not wish anyone to say of me 'only for a ribbon he left us'" (L 604). He was, of course, quoting Browning's inditement of Wordsworth's old age in "The Lost Leader."

O'Rahilly and others. Instead it is the internalized hero who faces his own death in a "master solitude" (VE 543), as Parnell does in "Parnell's Funeral," once the body politic has failed to live up to his standards. In that poem, Yeats uses the most graphic metaphor possible to suggest the disjunction of these two bodies: if someone had eaten Parnell's heart, all would have been well. But instead the Irish hero flees into death, Swift's grove.[1]

In Yeats's last poems, the division of the "two selves" of the poet is constantly alluded to. Typically, the contemplation of public faces -- like those in the Municipal Gallery -- leads to a heightened dualism in which the poet measures his distance from the modern world. This distance in turn allows the (human) self to release itself from external demands, as in "The Man and the Echo," in which he turns from his political errors to the personal conclusion: "Nor can there be work so great / As that which cleans man's dirty slate" (VE 632-33). The same movement is visible in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," where "dignity" is abandoned for a Lear-like return to the roots of personality. In the poem's drafts this is linked explicitly to the division of the self at the approach of death. The poetic chariot which is, as Harold Bloom has shown, such a strong romantic tradition, is uncoupled:[2]

> Why brood upon old triumph, prepare to die
> X Renounce immortality learn to die
> The burnished chariot is wheeled away from sight
> O hour of triumph come and make me gay[3]

Perhaps the most frightening late poem in this mode is "The Apparitions," with its opposition of the "popular eye" and the "long-planned half

1. Alex Zwerdling, Yeats and the Heroic Ideal (London: Peter Owen, 1965), pp. 125-29, argues that late in life Yeats again became interested in the heroic, but -- as in this poem -- dealing with their inner lives and hidden meanings rather than their value for Ireland.
2. Bloom, Poetry and Repression, ch. 4.
3. Curtis Bradford, Yeats at Work (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 160. The X indicates a cancelled line.

solitude" of retirement in which the poet's only audience is a tolerant friend willing to put up with his unintelligibility. The final solitude of the old man, immortality of the poetic and occult kinds laid aside, is evoked in the magnificent final stanza, the most fully human description of his ending:

> When a man grows old his joy
> Grows more deep day after day,
> His empty heart is full at length,
> But he has need of all that strength
> Because of the increasing Night
> That opens her mystery and fright.
> Fifteen apparitions have I seen;
> The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger. (VE 624)

The movement of the Last Poems as a whole is away from the "public" poet and his monument towards the man who confronts death, as I will show. In the sections which follow, I will explore Yeats's "two bodies" and his public and private selves as they can be seen to interact in a number of more specific figures.

3.2.2 Statues

One of Yeats's most consistent topics was that of statuary and sculptured form. T.R. Henn argues that "there is in Last Poems a preoccupation with statuary and paintings."[1] But in fact Yeats's references to statuary, sculpture, and monuments are more or less constant throughout his career, as a glance at the concordance shows. It is painting that becomes a more common topic in the late works, perhaps as a result of Yeats's art theory in A Vision. Henn refers, I suspect, to the thematic weight which is attached to statuary in the Last Poems, and to the particular intensity of Yeats's espousal of coldness and

1. T.R. Henn, "The Accent of Yeats's Last Poems," in Yeats: Last Poems, Casebook Series, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 131. Henn refers to the "Last Poems" of the Collected Poems, ie. to the last two volumes which Yeats published in the restored ordering.

sculptured form in his last volumes. Many readers have trouble in reconciling the emphasis on "Pythagorean" values embodied in sculpture with the equal emphasis on tragic fury in these volumes. Yeats's usual anti-rationalism and hatred of Bacon, Locke, Newton and Darwin co-existed with his recommendation that in order to understand proportion children should learn mathematics.[1] The usual explanation is that provided by Jon Stallworthy: "Great statues, great paintings -- all time-resisting works of art -- are in their technical perfection 'cold,' but at the same time products of an artist's passionate integrity."[2] This does not really seem to explain the relationship between the passionate and the sculptural as they appear in Yeats's later work. In order to understand Yeats's insistence that the "plummet-measured face" is what gives to "the sexual instinct its goal," we need to examine the process through which the statue becomes not the repression, but rather the expression of sexual values. Such a shift in emphasis precisely parallels Yeats's reassessment of his own old age.

In an essay on Yeats's use of statues and public monuments in his early dramatic poem "The Island of Statues," Michael North points out that the late Victorians whom Yeats called "the tragic generation" were fascinated by sculpture.[3] Works like The Renaissance focus on the ideal perfection of the human body, both as an objectification of the human form ("the first naive, unperplexed recognition of man by himself," as Pater put it), and as a formalized art in which coldness overcomes the inner qualities of passion and soul.[4] North argues that Yeats was able

1. In "Ireland After the Revolution" (E 440).
2. Jon Stallworthy, Vision and Revision in Yeats's Last Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 171.
3. Michael North, "The Paradox of the Mausoleum: Public Monuments and the Aesthetics of W.B. Yeats," CentR, 26 (1982), 221-38. North's article is restricted in its scope to Yeats's early work.
4. Ibid., p. 224.

to use such a formal perfection to skirt the problems of youthful sexuality. Yeats might well have agreed with Wyndham Lewis's Tarr on this:

> Deadness is the first condition for art: the second is absence of soul, in the human and sentimental sense. With the statue its lines and masses are its soul, no restless flammable ego is imagined for its interior: it has no inside: good art must have no inside. . . .[1]

In Yeats's earlier work, there are, North argues, two main usages of statuary. One is the value assigned to their antiquity: they are, like Oisin, representative of a golden age. The other role of statuary is to reconcile the need for a public art with the private, self-contained vision of the artist -- a usage which anticipates Yeats's theory of the mask. The statue may stand in the market-place visible to all, and retain its composure.[2]

In Yeats's middle period, both these aspects of statuary are used as figures for an artistic barrenness -- for example in two poems of artistic weariness which I discussed earlier. The artist can seem to become simply a public statue, like that of "Men Improve with the Years," "A weather-worn, marble triton / Among the streams" (VE 329). Alternatively, a recourse to sculptural values may indicate a subservience to conventional and mechanical production, as when in "The Living Beauty" Yeats bids his "discontented heart" draw content "From beauty that is cast out of a mould / In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears" (VE 334). In the theories of art developed in A Vision such weariness is suggested by the aging of cultures, in particular by the decline of the plastic arts from the "antithetical" (true) sculpture of Phidias to the "primary" (realistic) art of the Romans. Yeats dwells particularly lovingly on those Roman statues with replaceable screw-on

1. Wyndham Lewis, Tarr (1918; 2nd rev. ed. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928), p. 303.
2. See North, "The Paradox of the Mausoleum," pp. 236-38.

heads attached to standard torsos, an interest which parallels the fascination with severed heads in his plays of the 1930s.

I will discuss the special uses of a sexual thematics in the plays in the next section. But in Yeats's late career as a whole, the statue comes to represent not so much permanence as change. It is, in part, an apocalyptic symbol, for if it does not endure, then little can survive free from change in history. In places, stone actually comes to life: the Sphinx in "The Second Coming" is an early such image, releasing a terrifying message into the world. The "Old Rocky Face" of "The Gyres" presides over the passing of all things, even the traditionally immutable Platonic ideal: "Things thought too long can be no longer thought" (VE 564). Whatever the precise genesis of the "Old Rocky Face" in Yeats's thought, it is clear that it is associated with the "cavern" of the poem's second stanza, out of which comes the instruction to "Rejoice" at the "blood and mire" of the new gyre.[1] The rhetoric of the opening stanzas celebrates impermanence: "For beauty dies of beauty, worth of worth, / And ancient lineaments are blotted out" -- the "ancient lineaments" suggesting those of the Rocky Face. By the final stanza Yeats is suggesting that the new influx will come "From marble of a broken sepulchure," from the shattered stone itself. The process through which it is produced is depicted in terms of sexual violation:

> What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
> And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
> What matter?

Such a "desecration" is shared with the plays. Applied to statuary, it acts like a version of the Pygmalion myth, imposing sexual fantasies on cold form (rather than using statuary, as North argues Yeats does in his early work, to avoid sexuality). In a 1906 essay Yeats writes in this

1. On the many possible sources of "Old Rocky Face," see A. Norman Jeffares, A New Commentary on the Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 359-60.

vein:

> Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is in the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from the entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body. (E&I 292-93)

It cannot be said that the "fountain jetting from the body" is (simply) ejaculatory; but there is in such formulae a reference to processes which find parallels in sexual functions. Interestingly, Richard Ellmann points to the late unpublished poem "Art Without Imitation" as Yeats's warning that (as the poem argues) "an art based on abstractions would castrate its subjects and make them unfit for love and life."[1]

"Lapis Lazuli," the poem which follows "The Gyres," also deals with statuary and the perfection of art -- the ideal passion of Hamlet and Lear. But in the poem's third and fifth stanzas even the "handiwork of Callimachus" and the piece of Chinese lapis lazuli which was the poem's occasion is depicted as eroded:

> Every discoloration of the stone,
> Every accidental crack or dent,
> Seems a water-course or an avalanche. . . . (VE 567)

As the work returns to nature, its weathering seems to provide fresh images and insight, like Yeats's supposition that "doubtless plum or cherry-branch / Sweetens the little half-way house / Those Chinamen climb towards." He adds, "and I / Delight to imagine them seated there," and if the "there" refers to the half-way house (as the sentence's logic indicates) then Yeats has already moved them on from their frozen position. Picture, to use the terminology which one critic employs, has

1. Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 243. See also Hazard Adams, "Yeatsian Art and Mathematic Form," CentR, 4 (1960), 70-88.

been supplanted by gesture, and the carved figures break into song: "Accomplished fingers begin to play."[1]

In Yeats's final volume similar movements are discernible. "The Statues" is one of Yeats's fiercest late works, and its peculiar mixture of violence and emphasis on "number" has attracted few admirers. Yet it too contains a buried sexual thematics which makes it less at odds than it would seem with the poem which follows it, "News for the Delphic Oracle." The statues in the poem "lack character" and are thus the epitome of antithetical (subjective) art. They possess "unity of being," yet this does not imply that (as Wilson argues) they represent the mystic or ideal shape of the dead. Yeats nowhere states that the human dead can achieve unity of being; it is an artistic state. Moreover complete unity of being is an isolated perfection, and the figures of phase 15 must, according to A Vision, be expressed through a "primary" mode in order to become the poet's muse-principle.[2] The ideal forms must be drawn into life, and instead of it being that the pale "boys and girls" are drawn "beyond the sexual into the archetypal world. . . . to understand the true religious significance of Pythagoras's statues," as Wilson puts it, more nearly the opposite is true.[3] The statues are redeemed in time by the (mastabatory) fantasies of those who contemplate them:

1. Edward Engleberg, The Vast Design: Patterns in W.B. Yeats's Aesthetic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), ch. 3. A.E. Dyson discusses Yeats's emphasis on the "mortality of art" in "Lapis Lazuli" in his Yeats, Eliot, and R.S. Thomas: Riding the Echo (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 179-83. On a similar movement in "Her Vision in the Wood," Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 173, remarks that "Pageants in Yeats have a way of turning into realities."
2. See Vendler's discussion of this question in the context of a difficult passage in A Vision (1925), Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 150-51.
3. F.A.C. Wilson, Yeats's Iconography (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960), p. 297.

> Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
> His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
> In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
> But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
> Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
> That passion could bring character enough,
> And pressed at midnight in some public place
> Live lips upon a plummet-measured face. (VE 610)

As in the Blakean proverb which Yeats enjoyed quoting, it is eternity which is in love with the productions of time. The worst fate is to become the thin, dreamless and intellectual Hamlet of the poem's third stanza, unable to translate dream into desire.

In the passage from On the Boiler which is often used to gloss this poem, Yeats both rails against Cartesian rationalism and propounds the ideas of form which appear in the poem. The function of "form" is to serve as a mould for life, for the birth of the next age:

> we must hold to what we have that the next civilization may be born, not from a virgin's womb, nor a tomb without a body, not from a void, but of our own rich experience. These gifts must return, not in the mediumistic sleep dreaming or dreamless, but when we are wide awake.[1]

As he adds, "I too expect the counter-Renaissance, but if we do not hold to freedom and form it will come, not as an inspiration in the head, but as an obstruction in the bowels." Bowels, here as elsewhere, are associated with instinct, which must be refined into a conscious tradition. If there is no form or receptacle for rebirth, then the new age -- and the poet's image in it -- may be formless or grotesque, like Congal reborn as a donkey in The Herne's Egg. The poet facing the coming age must retain control even of its birth.

Control, however, is what Yeats continually loses in the Last Poems (and I will argue that this loss of control is planned). Even "The Statues" moves from its emphasis on form to the near-rant of Yeats's condemnation of the "filthy modern tide." The Irish climb not to the

1. On the Boiler (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1939), p. 27.

light of the Mediterranean which Yeats associated with the Greek sculptors, but to a "proper dark." The poem immediately following is "News for the Delphic Oracle," in which the philosophers so recently praised are all mocked. The "golden codgers" are presented not with the edifying spectacle suggested by one of the poem's models, Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," but with the rape of Thetis.[1] As Daniel Albright points out, the classical figures in the poem are all associated with statuary; though Pythagoras represents more than simply the abstract and "impersonal."[2] The fixity of art in these figures, and in the artistic models of the poem (Poussin's painting of "The Marriage of Peleas and Thetis"), are forced into life by "intolerable music" and the chaotic scene in which "nymphs and satyrs / Copulate in the foam." Again, the sculptural is displaced by movement and song.

The last of the poems from Yeats's final volume which I will consider is "A Bronze Head," a poem which comes, as Stanley Sultan points out, at the point where the volume turns from the formal and public to the personal.[3] Maude Gonne's bust recalls those semi-sculptural humans whom Yeats had slightly earlier described in "Beautiful Lofty Things": "O'Leary's noble head," John Butler Yeats's "beautiful mischievous head," Maude Gonne's "arrogant head" (VE 577-78). The bust seems "Human, superhuman," and is described in supernatural terms: bringing to mind a "great tomb-haunter" bound up in the "Hysterica passio of its own emptiness" (VE 618). Yeats's contemplation of the bust involves an uncertainty about the status of such representations which runs through the whole poem. Initially he speculates about the survival of the spirit it represents (though the real Maude Gonne was still alive). But he

1. On the poem's sources, see T.R. Henn, The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, 2nd. ed. (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 248-49; Albright, ch. 3.
2. Albright, p. 136.
3. Stanley Sultan, Yeats at His Last (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1975), pp. 33-34.

quickly moves to the topic of memory and the question: "Which of her forms has shown her substance right?" The poem's final two stanzas catalogues two responses to the vision of Maude Gonne: one a "vision of terror" in which he sees a fatal weakness both within her and himself, another an awareness of her as a supernatural presence looking out over "this foul world in its decline and fall." What the bust does not do is provide any fixity or acceptable public image. There is no "final" relationship with either the past (memory) or the future which it sustains; and instead of containing passion it releases a vision of error and catastrophe. Statuary as a metaphor for art in this poem does not contain or dispel passion; rather in creates passion and anxiety as the representation of Maude Gonne inspires a type of apocalyptic thought in the poet. In order to examine this subject more fully, its place in Yeats's late career as a whole, and in particular the moment at which the statue is "overcome," I will turn to the plays which Yeats wrote in the 1930s.

3.2.3 The Severed Head

In 1933, Yeats wrote two plays, The King of the Great Clock Tower, and its revised version A Full Moon in March, entitled "The Severed Head" in its drafts.[1] The two plays were intended to shake him out of the period of poetic inactivity which had followed the death of Lady Gregory in May 1932. He later commented, "I made up the play that I might write lyrics out of dramatic experience, all my personal experience having in some strange way come to an end" (L 819).[2] Yeats, like some later

1. Bradford, Yeats at Work, p. 274.
2. Yeats had written "Sun and Stream at Glendalough" in June 1932, and "Parnell's Funeral" in April 1933, but spent most of the previous year on A Vision and his essays, as well as a lecture tour.

readers, tended to dismiss the plays as inferior works. But they are particularly interesting as attempts to overcome that sense of blockage and to generate fresh energy from the resources of art rather than life. Each of the plays can be seen as an enactment of the predicament of the writer whose relationship with his own figures has become dubious.

The two plays are based loosely on the story of Salome, though there are a number of other possible sources. Both plays concern a cold, distant queen who is like the "statue of solitude" in The Only Jealousy of Emer, described in The King of the Great Clock Tower as "dumb as an image made of wood or metal" (VP 993), and in the later version as set in "emblematic niches" (VP 989). The queen has a lunar perfection which is entirely passive (suggesting "phase one" of Yeats's occult system), but which is also deathly: she is "a screen between the living and the dead" (VP 993), and persistently associated with coldness and virginity.[1] In both plays the stroller enters, an anarchic poet who challenges and "defiles" her, breaking the mould in which she is imprisoned at the cost of his life: his head is struck off. The process by which the queen is moved is described in sexual terms. In The King of the Great Clock Tower the lyric that she produces anticipates those Yeats later used in "The Three Bushes":

> O, what may come
> Into my womb,
> What caterpillar
> My beauty consume? (VP 1001)

In the second play it is "desecration and the lover's night" which is presented in the coitus-like final dance (VP 989). The sexuality is even more explicit in Yeats's drafts: the attendants speak of "the seed of

1. Vendler, p. 145, argues that the queen is phase 14, moving into phase 15 after contact with the poet. However her self-enclosure and formlessness suggests a primary state, especially in the earlier version. Gloria Kline, in The Last Courtly Lover: Yeats and the Idea of Women (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 146, argues that she is primary.

dead men," and Yeats notes that "her dance expresses the sexual act."[1] The swineherd tells the tale which prophesies his own death and its outcome:

> There is a story in my country of a woman
> That stood and bathed in blood -- a drop of blood
> Entered the womb and there begat a child. (VP 989)

In the actual final scene of each play, there is a difference between the earlier and the later versions. In The King of the Great Clock Tower the resolution is more occult, celebrating the midnight point "where the dead and living kiss" (VP 1003). The truths which the first attendant sings (as proxy for the severed head) are unspeakable:

> Sacred Virgil never sang
> All the marvel there began,
> But there's a stone upon my tongue.
> A moment more and it tolls midnight. (VP 1003)

Having a stone upon the tongue, or the tongue becoming a stone, is a figure which Yeats uses at various points in his career to indicate that the speaker has reached a dangerous limit.[2] The "soul" in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" (1927) idealizes a perfected wisdom: "Such fullness in that quarter overflows," but concludes that it cannot be expressed: "when I think of that my tongue's a stone" (VE 478).

In A Full Moon in March Yeats dropped the king from the play and gave the queen a speaking part, among other changes.[3] The ending of the play celebrates the Queen's experience, but not directly: the songs which comment and extemporize on the play's main themes are spoken through the two attendants, a dramatic device which reinforces the separation of action from lyric, and allows the attendants to be depicted

1. Bradford, Yeats at Work, pp. 274, 288.
2. Cf. his statement in the 1901 essay "Magic" that "if you speak over-much of the things of Faery your tongue becomes like a stone" (E&I 51).
3. In particular, Yeats emphasised the Queen's virginity more in the second version (in which she has no husband). Some features of the original version are attributable to its being written for Ninette De Valois, who did not want a speaking role.

as interpreting and learning from what they observe.[1] The play's language is involved in this process -- reflecting Yeats's preoccupation in these years with clearing away the last vestiges of the language of the 1890s -- and as Richard Taylor points out, the interplay of the queen's mannered and archaic speech (like that of Yeats's earlier plays) and the swineherd's more colloquial speech produce "a sort of poetic subplot" which mirrors the main action.[2] The lyrics are themselves the product of the union of swineherd and queen which climaxes the action, and they carry the greatest weight of interest. The play thus both serves as a vehicle for and enacts the production of lyrics from its dramatic themes. Helen Vendler writes that the plays are "dramatic neither in conception nor in end, but are rather devices within which to embody lyrics."[3] The metaphor of "embodiment" is interesting here; the lyrics are, in fact, equated with the dis-embodiment of the stroller/swineherd, with the severing of the head -- with its singing voice -- from the body.

Despite any differences, each of the "severed head" plays describes what could be called the desecration of art. The Absolute must drop its veil and enter time in what becomes a version of the Pygmalion myth, though in Yeats's case one which is imbued with a particular hostility towards the idealized beauty. Such an apocalyptic encounter of the poet and his desire or muse is an imaginative procedure common in Yeats's later works. It can, for example, be seen in the treatment of the aristocratic mother in his last play, Purgatory. She too is "desecrated" by her brutal and lowly husband and produces the Yeats-like old man (at

1. The first song is that of the First Attendant; after the "discovery" of the Queen with the severed head the First Attendant sings "as" the Queen, the Second Attendant "as" the head.
2. Richard Taylor, A Reader's Guide to the Plays of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 144.
3. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, p. 141.

least, in his obsessions).[1] If one accepts the analogy in which the mother represents the old order in Ireland, then arguably the same pattern is presented in that play: Ireland's fate becomes an analogy for Yeats's.[2] But in Purgatory too the "fall" is fortunate in that as it produces fresh song, even it Yeats is in that play bitterly aware of the isolation of the protagonist at the end of a historical cycle.

If we remember the passage from A Vision which was quoted at the beginning of this section, then the millenial pattern can be seen in the two "severed head" plays. Yeats himself links the dance of Salome to a millenial "revelation" in his discussion of the ages approaching the birth of Christ (Phase one) in A Vision:

> When I think of the moment before revelation I think of Salome . . . dancing before Herod and receiving the prophet's head in her indifferent hands. . . . Seeking images, I see her anoint her bare limbs according to a medical prescription of that time, with lion's fat, for lack of the sun's ray, that she may gain the favour of a king, and remember that the same impulse will create the Galilean revelation and deify Roman Emperors whose sculptured heads will be surrounded by the solar disc. Upon the throne and upon the cross alike the myth becomes a biography. (AV 273).

As usual, Yeats's imagery is consistent; harlot and lion are two of the images which "constitute the wild" in "Those Images" (VE 601). "Myth becomes biography" is not only applicable to Christ's incarnation; it is also a good description of the movement of the two plays discussed above. Curtis Bradford links A Full Moon in March to an unpublished dialogue of 1916, "The Poet and the Actress," in which Yeats discusses a symbol theatre: "The body begins to take poses or even move in a dance . . . we begin to possess, instead of the real world of the mimics, solitudes and wildernesses peopled by divinities and daimons."[3] But in

1. For an interpretation of the play along these lines, see Dudley Young, Out of Ireland: A Reading of Yeats's Poetry (Cheadle, Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1975), p. 157.
2. The relevant historical parallels are supplied by Donald T. Torchiana, W.B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 355-64.
3. Bradford, Yeats at Work, pp. 292-93.

play the "actress" is frozen solid, immobile. The stroller opposes not realism but perfection, and instead of "the desires of the heart cast into forms" (as the essay phrases it), there is a movement out of form, into "biography."

Bradford's argument is, however, more applicable to the other facet of the main action: the severing of the poet/stroller/swineherd's head. Vendler argues that one of the lyrics celebrates the fact that "In being made into a poem, life is detached, made into something external and public, sacrificed on the altar of form."[1] As I have suggested, "form" is itself attacked. But the severing of the head does suggest a kind of creative detachment which draws on an analogy with the sculptural. Here, the relevant myth is that of Orpheus rather than Pygmalion, though Yeats had, as he points out himself in the play's introduction, used severed heads in works like the story of Donnabo and Lomna in The Wind Among the Reeds, and that of Dectira and Aodh in The Secret Rose. It is a common theme in Victorian poetry. One particularly striking account of its potency is that given by Francis Thompson -- whom Yeats called "that learned scholar, great poet and devout man" (AV 250) -- in his celebrated essay on Shelley, which Yeats was likely to have read when it appeared in The Dublin Review in 1908:

> Most poets, probably, like most saints, are prepared for their mission by an initial segregation, as the seed is buried to germinate: before they utter the oracle of poetry, they must first be divided from the body of men. It is the severed head that makes the seraph.[2]

The head represents the poet's solitude and fertility, the "fibrous darkness" from which Yeats described myth as coming (E&I 429). True song is the product of the acceptance of death and the recklessness of

1. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, p. 156.
2. Francis Thompson, Shelley (London: Burns and Oates, 1911), p. 34. The essay was written in 1899; but was first published in the The Dublin Review, July 1908, prompting the magazine's first ever second edition.

Orpheus/Dionysus, the god-like poet who is reborn.[1] As Ellmann remarks, "the poet's head is severed but still sings because, in Auden's words, the death of the poet is kept from his poems, or, in language more like Yeats's, because images fructified by human patterns survive physical destruction."[2] It is not only a matter of survival, however, but of continued power over the frozen statue who represents the stroller's muse. In this play, Yeats asserts that his art still lives.

Yeats's final words on this theme are contained in his last-written play, The Death of Cuchulain. In it, he provides a final perspective on the heroic drama of his earlier years: a completion of the saga which he had deferred two decades. But the play is very different in mood from the earlier drama, and like all of Yeats's late plays has been interpreted in widely different ways: as "a play of rejoicing," as "full of obscurity," as a last attempt to raise dead passion, as ironical or anti-heroic.[3] To some extent it is obscure; rendered more complex by the presence of the Old Man who introduces it and insists that its subject-matter is "antiquated romantic stuff" unfit for this "vile age" (VP 1051).[4] The old man's own "vile age," and thus implicitly the sensibility of the playwright, is also a factor. He must be warned by the players off-stage whenever he is growing over-excited, and suggests both that he is brought on because he is "out of fashion and out of date" like the play, and that his own mood would not countenance a play from

1. On Yeats's relation to the Orphic myth, see F.A.C. Wilson, W.B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Gollancz, 1958), ch. 2; and Whitaker, pp. 287-88.
2. Richard Ellmann, Eminent Domain: Yeats Among Wilde, Joyce, Pound, Eliot and Auden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 24.
3. See the partial review of the literature provided by A. Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland, A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 297-310.
4. The old man was originally given some lines within the body of the play, later assigned to the Morrigu, Cuchulain's Fate. See Phillip L. Marcus, ed., The Death of Cuchulain: Manuscript Materials, Including the Author's Final Text (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 7.

the heroic age. The prologue thus serves to demonstrate both continuity and discontinuity: to cut the play off from the corpus of earlier Cuchulain plays, as a head is severed.

There is in The Death of Cuchulain the implicit presence of a public monument, the statue of the dying hero in the Dublin Post Office which depicts the scene which is the play's ending, and which is mentioned in the final song, a memorial to the Easter uprising. Yeats's attitude to the statue and to the events which it celebrates had been modified since he wrote "Easter, 1916" by his disillusionment with Irish politics. His view of the rite of the hero had changed, in particular. One of the best glosses on The Death of Cuchulain is that provided by the introduction which Yeats wrote in 1932 for Fighting the Waves:

> The heroic act, as it descends through tradition, is an act done because a man is himself, because, being himself, he can ask nothing of other men but room amid remembered tragedies; a sacrifice of himself to himself, almost, so little may he bargain, of the moment to the moment. I think of some Elizabethan play where, when mutineers threaten to hang the ship's captain, he replies: "What has that to do with me?" (E 375)

What matters is the intensely subjective experience which Yeats here calls "the sacrifice of himself to himself." The story of the Elizabethan sea-captain captures the indifference with which Cuchulain goes to his death as he stands in the pose of Sheppard's statue, bound to the pillar with, in Yeats's revision of the legend, his head about to be cut off by the blind man:

> Cuchulain. There floats out there
> The shape that I am to take when dead,
> My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape,
> And is that not a strange shape for the soul
> Of a great fighting-man?
>
> Blind Man. Your shoulder is there,
> This is your neck. Ah! Ah! Are you ready Cuchulain!

Cuchulain. I say it is about to sing.

(The stage darkens.)

(VP 1060-61)

Like A Full Moon in March, the severed head or soul generates "song" -- a lyric which describes the ecstatic experience. Although "Cuchulain Comforted" was not actually included in the play, it describes the ambiguous state of the hero after death in a way which has always been linked to the play. Like the other "severed head" lyrics, it is a passionate supplement to the drama which precedes it, expressing the reactions of the onlookers to the rite, as well as giving some clues on the fate of the dead poet or hero.

If the hero's ultimate fate can be described only in the detached lyric, while outwardly he displays indifference, then what of Sheppard's "bad statue"? In the letter in which he called it that, Yeats added the comment: "For us a legendary man or woman must still be able to fight or to dance."[1] The statue must, that is, be re-incarnated in the present age. It is the failure of his time to do any such thing which is depicted in the final bitter song. This does not imply that it is unpatriotic (though Yeats seems to have toned down any patriotic element in the drafts), but that the attempt of a primary age to monumentalize the act by which the spirit of Cuchulain is incarnated is bound to fail. The final song focusses not on the eternal, but on the failure to produce it. The "things that men adore and loath" which the harlot sings of are not, recent publication of the drafts has shown, the Sidhe, the dead past (as Wilson and others have interpreted the ambiguous phrasing as meaning), but instead the present debased age, including its failure.[2]

This, the generation of a passion at the end of a life and an age, is the

1. William Rothenstein, Scattered Branches, ed. Stephen Gwynn (New York: Macmillan, 1940), p. 52. Letter of 29 Dec 1938.
2. The Death of Cuchulain, ed. Marcus, pp. 12-15.

meaning of the final stanza of the song; and the statue depicted there marks not a presence but an absence:

> No body like his body
> Has modern woman borne,
> But an old man looking back on life
> Imagines it in scorn.
> A statue's there to mark the place,
> By Oliver Sheppard done.
> So ends the tale that the harlot
> Sang to the beggar-man. (VP 1063)

The presence of the old man at the play's beginning, and the singer at the play's ending, both surrogates for Yeats, is crucial. As in the other late plays it is the lyrics which are generated by the spectacle of the severed head -- the hero's death -- which carry the most intensity, separate from the main action. It is as if Yeats were staging a private, internalized drama in which the contemplation of death is the central element.

There is also present in the play another set of statues: the seven parallelograms which represent the heads of Cuchulain and his foes, and which inspire Emer's final dance. The old man had explained: "Emer must dance, there must be severed heads -- I am old, I belong to mythology -- severed heads for her to dance before. I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood" (VP 1052). The parallelograms are statues which have abandoned any public, "realistic" form, retaining instead a power to inspire dance and song, their abstraction taking on shape only in the desire of the dancer. Cuchulain, like Yeats himself, is abandoned to death unbounded. The final song asks "Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed / He stood where they had stood?" We could describe the same incarnational process with the author and his works: "thinking Yeats." <u>The Death of Cuchulain</u> is thus a schooling in

the possibilities of literature in which, as in the other late plays, we are taught that representation is secondary in comparison with the moment of incarnation. The presence of the corpse of the poet, the song which breaks from his severed head, the wonderment of the audience and the transposition of the song from the poet to the observers, all serve as an "allegory of reading" which is a model for both the final creativity of the poet and his posthumous fate.

I have traced the image of statuary in Yeats's work from its early use in reconciling a public art with youthful energy (and a repressed sexuality), though his middle period, where it represents both the communality of public art and the formalism of the artist when his passion has cooled, to the late period when the image of the statue is, through Yeats's millennial thought and the theme of the severed head, "desecrated" into life again. Sexuality is reinjected into the corpus which risks petrification; and sculptural values are at best compromised by the intensity of inner feeling, which constantly exceeds the "container" of art -- the bust of Maude Gonne, for example. The statue remains in some sense an image for the persistence of art beyond the author's death, but apocalyptic and vitalistic rather than static. Yeats expected to change shape after death -- to be modified in the guts of the living," as Auden put it in his elegy -- even while he preached the value of "eternal" forms to contain the passions of most of mankind. The fragmentation and dismemberment of the monument thus becomes a mode of engaging with the future which anticipates and draws strength from the death of the poet.

3.2.4 Sexuality

It is often pointed out that Yeats makes extensive use of sexual themes in his late work. He himself commented in 1927, hyperbolically, that "sex and the dead" were the only fit subjects for "a serious and studious mind" (L 730). Vivienne Koch, in a representative statement, argues that "in sexual experience . . . Yeats found the energy, the imagery and the basic antinomies of mortality organized into an intricate and tragic nexus."[1] Critics generally do not, however, attempt to explain why he found such a thematics rewarding, pointing at best to his Steinach operation, or to his feeling that he needed fresh and more startling material. Some have suggested that the latter pressure simply led to a clumsy offensiveness.[2] But it can, I think, be argued that in the fecundity of sexual experience Yeats found an important analogy with his own creative processes in old age.

Yeats's use of sexual imagery has its roots in the poems which he wrote after his marriage, in which he celebrates the liaison of the aging poet and the fresh energies of youth. In "The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid" the warrior Al-Rashid meditates on old age and impetus:

> neither enemy,
> Game-bird, nor woman does the same thing twice;
> And so a hunter carries in the eye
> A mimicry of youth. Can poet's thought
> That springs from body and in body falls
> Like this pure jet, now lost amid blue sky,
> Now bathing lily leaf and fish's scale,
> Be mimicry? (VE 463 - 64)

The reply given by the Platonic poet Kusta Ben Luka is that "The soul's own youth and not the body's youth / Shows through our lineaments." But he goes on to recount a personal history which parallels Yeats's. His

1. Vivienne Koch, W.B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase. A Study of the Last Poems (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 21.
2. See, for example, Geoffrey Thurley's criticism of what he sees as the "cynicism" of Yeats in this respect, in The Turbulent Dream: Passion and Politics in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), pp. 204-05.

own age has been compensated for by marriage to a young woman who brings truths that are "self-born, high-born, and solitary." As a result, all his former ideals have been displaced, and he is driven wild: "It seems I must buy knowledge with my peace." The poem's conclusion is that:

> All, all those gyres and cubes and midnight things
> Are but a new expression of her body
> Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her youth.
> And now my utmost mystery is out.
> A woman's beauty is a storm-tossed banner;
> Under it wisdom stands. . . .

He adds that "Of all Arabia's lovers I alone" can interpret the message. The expedient of automatic writing allows a sexual energy to be invested in the system of "gyres and cubes," and thus the poet may avoid a "mimicry" which is simply borrowed from the hunter's pursuit of fresh material.

In Yeats's later work, the same pattern is repeated. Sexuality is used to describe that moment at which a Dionysian energy informs "wisdom," even at the cost of disintegration. The incarnation is a particularly potent figure for such moments. Yeats's fascination with the incarnation and with what could more broadly be called the aesthetics of incarnation at any point where the supernatural and human meet was longstanding.[1] But a particular interest in the subject can be seen in the period which included and followed his alteration in mood in the late 1920s. The centrality of an aesthetics of incarnation or embodiment to literary change is discussed in Yeats's short essay on "The Need for Audacity of Thought," published in The Dial (after the Irish Statesman turned it down) in 1926. Insisting that "We must consider anew the foundations of existence," Yeats attacks those Christians who could not accept a controversial ballad included in a collection of traditional

1. See in particular Phillip L. Marcus's examination of the topic in the period up to The Only Jealousy of Emer (1919) in his "Incarnation in 'Middle Yeats,'" in the Yeats Annual, No. 1, ed. Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 68-81.

pieces. The ballad could almost have been one of Yeats's own; it describes the infant Jesus performing a miracle from within his mother's womb. The clerics who proscribed it could not, he declares, believe in "the reality of their own thoughts," in the incarnation not only as doctrine, but as human reality. Yeats saw in the ballad "all that seems impossible, blasphemous even . . . set forth in an old 'sing-song' that has yet a mathematical logic."[1] The same combination of song and the "mathematical logic" of the Great Wheel, incarnated in a woman, dominates many of his later poems.

In both the poems which Yeats singled out as indicative of his search for "a theme that might benefit my years" after the illness of 1928 there is an incarnational thematics.[2] In "Byzantium," there is an ambiguity surrounding those images which are "man or shade," "death-in-life and life-in-death" (VE 497). The poem's central image is the bird which is a mixture of "bird," "miracle," and "golden handiwork," and the golden bird which had been fixed and immutable in the earlier Byzantium poem "Can like the cocks of Hades crow," scorning both the natural world ("all complexities of mire or blood") and the absolute fixity of the symbol. The remainder of the poem deals with purgation, but even that involves an incarnational aspect: the spirits of the dead "die" into the dance, taking on the energy of the body which they are supposedly purging, and the "begetting" of images on images which ends the poem similarly mixes the spiritual and the organic. The "dying" of spirits is, of course, the type of Christ's sacrifice, though Yeats's ostensible subject is very different. In the other poem in which Yeats celebrates his awakening, "Veronica's Napkin" serves as symbol of

1. Uncollected Prose of W.B. Yeats, Vol. II, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975), 461-65.
2. See the letter to Dulac with which Yeats prefaced The Winding Stair in 1933, VE 831.

Christ's presence in the world, one of a series of historical images of divinity.[1] According to Yeats's scheme the old images of humans becoming gods (including "Berenice's Hair," the constellation which was the product of a famous sacrifice) are replaced in the Christian Era by the opposite, gods who become human.

The implications of a sexual aesthetic are developed particularly in "A Man Young and Old," one of the sequences in which Yeats, in an entirely different mood from A Vision, examines the ages of man. Written towards the end of Yeats's own public service, it is followed in The Tower by a poem mocking the monuments of the great: the statesman once again descends into the dust. In its occasionally autobiographical development, Yeats describes a man who has found a stony-hearted lover and himself become stone-like, unable to purge his feelings:

> bit of
> So like a stone I lie
> Under a broken tree.
> I could recover if I shrieked
> My heart's agony
> To passing bird, but I am dumb
> From human dignity. (VE 452)

In such a state, life becomes an "empty cup." Recovery comes through "old Madge," who seems to believe that the stone which she carries is a child. The old man first mocks her, then accepts her belief, in a stanza which includes the peacock's cry, the shriek of annunciation. This is from "His Wildness":

> Were I but there and none to hear
> I'd have a peacock cry,
> For that is natural to a man
> That lives in memory,
> Being all alone I'd nurse a stone
> And sing it lullaby. (VE 458-59)

These are the "old women's secrets" that Madge tells him: "Stories of the bed of straw / Or the bed of down." The sequence ends with

1. On the background of this poem, see Jeffares, A New Commentary, pp. 276-77. The napkin, bearing Christ's image, was said to be that which St. Veronica offered him to wipe his face.

Yeats's translation of the chorus from Oedipus at Colonus; and while it is different in tone to what preceeds it, the death-bed/marriage-bed metaphor is, as I suggested, accentuated. The sequence as a whole thus represents a schooling in an apocalyptic sexuality in whch stones give birth, and the poet learns to "shriek" -- a word repeated throughout the sequence -- as he is born into a new wildness.

The presence of an aesthetics of incarnation and allusions to a divine sexuality continue in the works which follow "A Man Young and Old." The opening poem of A Full Moon in March, "Parnell's Funeral," uses an image and asks a question on a pattern which is often repeated:

> a brighter star shoots down;
> What shudders run through all that animal blood?
> What is this sacrifice? Can someone there
> Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star? (VE 541)

The shooting star, here associated with a death, signals the heroic entering human affairs.[1] The same vocabulary of shuddering and shooting is applied in the inseminatory poems attached to A Full Moon in March, often accompanied by the same questioning rhetoric: "What Magic Drum?" or "Whence had they come?" are aimed at identifying the forces underlying history at the point where they are incarnated in human agents. Often Yeats asks whether the energy which is so released is organic or human, thus setting up the same ambiguity which we saw in "Byzantium." In "A Nativity" there is a whole series of such questions, which comprise the poem and its interrogation of the sources of genius:

> What woman hugs her infant there?
> Another star has shot an ear.
>
> What made the drapery glisten so?
> Not a man but Delacroix. (VE 625)

The movement is often, as in the "severed head" plays, the downwards one dictated by Yeats's belief, expressed both in A Vision and in his poetry,

1. On the incarnational nature of this image, see Henn, The Lonely Tower, pp. 202-03.

that "this age and the next age / Engender in the ditch" (VE 598). The degradation which includes that of old age and the coming historical movement is thus infused with a vital energy.

The most interesting aspect of Yeats's use of sexuality and death is, however, the metaphor and rhetoric of rebirth. Yeats was constantly predicting his "rebirth" throughout these years, undertaking different tasks in order to force himself into poetic utterance. He said that The King of the Great Clock Tower was written in order to produce lyrics, and made the same claim of The Herne's Egg: "I am trusting this play to give me a mass of new thought and feeling, overflowing into lyrics" (L 846). He also suggested that he undertook the task of editing The Oxford Book of Modern Verse in late 1934 that he might be "reborn in imagination."[1] On the Boiler produced lyrics associated with in or actually in it, as did other prose works of this period (the Michael Robartes stories published in 1932, for example). In all these works it is other types of writing -- the play and the essay -- which generate lyric poetry, just as A Vision had produced lyrics in the 1920s. A further important common factor is that each of the works involves the contemplation of endings, either of Yeats's literary tradition, or of the poet, or of civilization, as well as the possibility that Yeats will no longer write poetry. What spurs Yeats into song is at least partly the thought of writing no more, or of writing being worthless. The moment of over-ripeness or finality yields, as in the "severed head" plays, not completion, but a lyric supplementarity in which the poet "reads" himself in order to assert that there is more of himself, that the future is open.[2]

1. Letters on Poetry, pp. 20-21.
2. My use of the term "supplement" and its cognates, here and earlier in this section, draws on the work of Jacques Derrida. See Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 144-57, 280ff.

One early expression of such self-renewal is the stanza which Yeats used to preface the second volume of his Collected Works of 1908, in which he declares that his own sense of progress must be visible in his relationship to his whole corpus:

> The friends that have it I do wrong
> When ever I remake a song,
> Should know what issue is at stake;
> It is myself that I remake. (VE 778)

Such "revision" can also operate on a larger scale. The last line of the stanza above is, as Jon Stallworthy points out, echoed in the famous lyric of late 1936, "An Acre of Grass",[1]

> Grant me an old man's frenzy,
> Myself must I remake
> Till I am Timon and Lear. . . . (VE 576)

"An Acre of Grass" is a puzzling poem. Its first two stanzas deal with Yeats's final Irish haven at Riversdale; the house and "temptation" are quiet, and Yeats seems to imply, in the second stanza, that "truth" is unknowable. The second half of the poem moves to the fury of "An old man's eagle mind," with little to explain the transformation. Buried between the two halves of the poem is a sexual thematics -- present, as Stallworthy reports, in the poem's drafts, in a bawdy ballad about "Billy Boy" and his mate.[2] The remaking of self which the poem demands thus draws upon a "loose imagination" in both senses of that phrase.

In such cases Yeats is acting as his own muse, begetting himself on himself, and generating energy from the body of his own work. The iconography of the annunciation and the idea of parthenogenesis are applied to the poet, as in "Stream and Sun at Glendalough," the final poem of The Winding Stair:

1. Jon Stallworthy, Between the Lines: Yeats's Poetry in the Making (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 219.
2. Ibid., pp. 218-19.

> What motion of the sun or stream
> Or eyelid shot the gleam
> That pierced my body through?
> What made me live like those that seem
> Self-born, born anew? (VE 507)

The epithet "self-born" is a useful way of describing Yeats's efforts in taking on, as Samuel Hynes puts it, "a woman's private sexual identity" in order to infuse his work with energy.[1] The sexually powerful women he describes become part of his own identity, on the model of God in his "Supernatural Songs":

> But all that run in couples, on earth, in flood or air,
> share God that is but three,
> And could beget or bear themselves could they but
> love as He. (VE 556)

I have already examined one aspect of this process of "self-insemination" in discussing statuary in the previous section. I will discuss only one other example in detail, and that is the set of ballads and songs which Yeats wrote around "The Three Bushes" in 1936. Yeats's ballad is partly the product of another passionate friendship with a woman, Dorothy Wellesley, who sent him her own poem on the subject for "improvement."[2] Significantly, it is also a parallel to one of the stories which Yeats included in his The Secret Rose (1897), and thus a theme from his own work.[3] Its opening suppositions are similar to those of the "severed head" plays: a courtly maiden can only unite with her lover in death, a fact symbolized by the intertwining branches of the rose bushes over their graves. Instead she uses her chambermaid as a sexual surrogate. As A.M. Garab points out, its mock sub-title "An incident from the 'Historia mei Temporis' of the Abbe Pierre de Bourdeille" both refers to the chronicler Pierre de Bourdeille, who had been forced to withdraw from active life after a fall from a horse, and

1. Hynes, "All the Wild Witches," p. 580.
2. The story of the poem's genesis and the "contest" to produce the best poem on the theme is told in Letters on Poetry, pp. 69-82.
3. Stallworthy, Vision and Revision, p. 94. Cf. also VE 554.

also puns on "bordel" -- a fib or humbug -- and (possibly) "bordello."[1] It thus neatly combines the ironies of the old poet with his reputation for lechery and the real intentions of the poem.

If the main body of the poem is, at least in theory, drawn from the "inspiration" of Dorothy Wellesley's original attempt, the same cannot be said for the supplementary lyrics. These express what the ballad narrative cannot hold: the feelings of the participants in the "story," in particular their lust. They express, in fact, the fecundity of the theme, as the integrity of the narrative is violated and its sexual subject-matter spills out into six additional songs. The language of the songs reproduces this sexual excess, replacing the mannered archaism of the parent verse with a verbal primitivism, "language beaten / Into one name" as the "lady" puts it (VE 572). The theme of the poem -- that the lover will "cram love's two divisions / Yet keep his substance whole" -- is reflected in the mixing of tenor and vehicle in passages like this, "The Chambermaid's Second Song":

> From pleasure of the bed,
> Dull as a worm,
> His rod and its butting head
> Limp as a worm,
> His spirit that has fled
> Blind as a worm.

The worm here is both bodily organ and spirit, just as the sexual act is both heaven (for the chambermaid) and hell (for the lady). This division is also, of course, partly that which Yeats had practised with his mistress "Diana Vernon" and Maude Gonne; but it is interesting that both in these lyrics and in his discussion of them in the letters he shows more interest in the plight of the chambermaid as the almost androgynous repository of ancient secrets, and the sexual centre of the poems. The grouping as a whole thus represents an example of Yeats generating

1. Arra M. Garab, "Fabulous Artifice: Yeats's 'Three Bushes' Sequence," Criticism, 7 (1965), 235-49.

subject matter from what is both thematically and in origin an "old tale." Sexuality in such cases is not only a "theme"; it is, rather, a metaphor for the poet's creative activity, one of the secrets of an old age which both "lacks a theme" and is "self-begotten, born anew."

3.2 Yeats and the Ending

Endings had long been an important moment for Yeats. He saw himself as one of the "last romantics," at the end of a historical cycle, and a large part of A Vision can be seen as an attempt to come to terms with this sense of lateness. Death and the fruits of death were also important to his late creativity, as we have seen. A Vision was itself originally divided into three parts approximating to the three stances which I described in chapter one: the retrospective, the immediate, and the prospective.[1] In this section, I will begin by examining one aspect of Yeats's treatment of the soul after death in A Vision, as an example of the prospective mode, before moving on to consider an essentially retrospective category, purgation, and concluding with a discussion of Yeats's last poems, which can be shown to move, typically, from the public and prospective to the private and immediate.

Many critics have argued that Yeats's theories about the fate of the soul after death in A Vision can be interpreted as aesthetic metaphors, but few have been willing to go into much detail on the subject.[2] I will focus my discussion on the second of the six phases between death and rebirth, the Meditation, which is comprised of the Dreaming Back and the

1. See A Critical Edition, p. xliii.
2. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, p. 255, concludes that the metaphors of A Vision "are intelligible statements about the poetic process, the poetic mind, and the poetic product." However her own study does not examine A Vision directly, tending instead to borrow from it unsystematically in order to elucidate certain aspects of the plays.

Return, arguing that it provides an analogy for the processes of composition and reading.

According to Yeats's theory, the Dreaming Back involves the recapitulation of intense moments of emotional fixation, in an order determined by the intensity of the emotion. The Return, on the other hand, involves a sequential reliving of those events in chronological order. The result is a parallel to Freudian therapy: where there is id, ego shall be. The mediation between the two processes is not (as one might have expected) at the end of the Dreaming Back, but instead as a constant dialectical shuffling between re-living and "reading-off" what has been produced, the reading being achieved through a movement from particular, ineffable experience to a "language" provided by the unconscious or Anima Mundi:

> After its imprisonment by some event in the Dreaming Back, the Spirit relives that event in the Return and turns it into knowledge, and then falls into the Dreaming Back once more. The Spirit finds the concrete events in the Passionate Body, but the names and words of the drama it must obtain, the Faculties having gone when the Husk and Passionate Body disappeared, from some incarnate Mind, and this it is able to do because all spirits inhabit our unconsciousness or, as Swedenborg said, are the Dramatis Personae of our dreams.
> (AV 226-27)

Thus, the spirit (or the writer, if we pursue the analogy) alternates between a state of intense feeling akin to the poetic epiphany, and a less localized recollection of what has been produced (written) in that way, converting it into memory and biography. Such a reflexive reading of Yeats's theories about the state of the soul after death ignores the obvious occultism of other parts of A Vision, but it does allow us to see just what the process of poet becoming part of the Anima Mundi -- the great poem to which Yeats, following Shelley, said that all poets contribute -- might be. In the note which Yeats appends to the passage

quoted above, the interpretation in terms of Yeats's poetics can be extended:

> My instructors said once that under certain circumstances a Spirit [read "poet"] can draw knowledge of such things as language from the Husks [read "works"] of the dead, but only if those Husks are separated from their Spirits. It seems that a mind must, as it were, release a thought before it becomes general property. (AV 277, note 1)

Rather in the same manner, we convert Yeats into "general property," a part of the corpus of English literature, after the point at which the Husk is separated from Spirit, and left as a dead remainder.[1] Yeats also specifies that in the Return -- which, interestingly, may last "for centuries" (AV 228) -- the spirit may conduct that almost amounts to research into itself, infiltrating other minds through the Anima Mundi at a level below that of "concrete memory" (AV 228-29). Even more suggestively, this only occurs "when the soul has great intensity and where those consequences [ie. of passionate acts recalled in the Dreaming Back] affected great numbers" (AV 228). The type of consciousness involved in this very literary afterlife is a severely limited one, pertaining only to the unfolding or purgation of particular passionate events, as if the poet were locked into his works.

Thus, if we ignore certain aspects of Yeats's occultism, it is possible to construct from his theories in A Vision an account of the fate of the poet's work after death, in particular the splitting of the corpus from the dying poet, and its progress into the minds of the readers of the future. The same interpretation can be placed on many of Yeats's pronouncements in Per Amica Silentia Lunae, for example when he claims that the dead "cannot originate except through the living" (M

1. Earlier in A Vision, Yeats associates the Husk with "the human body," but behind it, he adds, "is the Daimon's hunger to make apparent to itself certain Daimons, and the organs of sense are that hunger made visible" (AV 188-89). The husk, here, can be associated with the desire for understanding as it is mediated through the sense organs -- including, of course, the process of reading.

355-56), or when he claims that the memories and dreams of the dead constitute or replace instinct (M 359). Yeats's occult writings are in general characterized by a density of literary reference, and even self-reference, which stands in sharp contrast to most other occult writers. Even where he presses the claims of occult images over books, as he does in "Ego Dominus Tuus" (the poem prefacing Per Amica), he tends to undermine his own assertions: here with quotations from himself, Shelley, Blake and Spenser, and even a footnote added to the 1924 re-issue to the effect that he could have understood one passage if he had re-read his play The Hour-Glass (1914). Interpretation and (occult) inspiration are thus constantly conflated.

The self-referential element in Yeats's speculations about life after death can be seen right up to the last poems he wrote. I will take only one example, that provided by "The Man and the Echo," written in the last six months of Yeats's life. In "The Man and the Echo" the processes of purgation and self-understanding described in A Vision are assigned both to the "now" of the poem and to the time after death -- both to the poet and to humanity in general. Yeats begins by reviewing his own life:

> All that I have said and done,
> Now that I am old and ill,
> Turns into a question till
> I lie awake night after night. . . . (VE 632)

Yet this personal agon, described in the first person, is incorporated (as elsewhere in Yeats's work) into a general process, described in the third-person (emphasis added):

> But body gone he sleeps no more.
> And his intellect grows sure
> That all's arranged in one clear view,
> Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,
> Then stands in judgement on his soul,
> And, all work done, dismisses all
> Out of intellect and sight
> And sinks at last into the night.

The elision of the distinction between "he" and "I" reinforces the idea that Yeats's occult theory can best be seen as a discussion of poetry and the fate of the poetic corpus: the "thoughts that I pursue." Yeats's self-analysis is equated with the purgative process, though in this very late poem the actual moment of death enters the poem as a disturbance in the final stanza (an animal's death-cry) which questions the relationship between theory and experience.

3.3.1 Purgation

T.S. Eliot, in a famous judgement, said that the state depicted in Yeats's penultimate play Purgatory (1938) was unacceptably heterodox, a cyclic prison from which there is little escape.[1] It is indeed a curious work to come at the end of a career, a strange vehicle for his most fundamental convictions, as he put it, "about this world and the next."[2] But the "beatific vision" which Yeats had predicted as topic never came to him; he was no Dante. Instead, he found in the topic of purgation, itself a part of his official "wisdom," a way of expressing the decay of such ambitions, and a mode of creativity appropriate to the end of a life.

"Purgation" in the Christian tradition refers to a double-edged process; both the achievement of a purified state, and payment for past sins. Yeats exploits this ambiguity to the full. In his 1897 essay on Blake's Dante he describes what could be called the ideal version of purgatory: "True art is the flame of the last day, which begins for every man when he is first moved by beauty, and which seeks to burn all things until they become 'infinite and holy'" (E&I 140). This is

1. T.S. Eliot, "Yeats," p. 258.
2. Quoted by Joseph Hone, W.B. Yeats, 1865-1939, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 472.

aesthetics. But in the 1920s Yeats became more interested in the fate of the dead, and with the working out of passions in a consuming fire which "expiates" (to use his term) past suffering or actions. In order to understand this concern, we need to recall the way in which Yeats saw his own life in this period.

In Romantic Image (1957), Frank Kermode emphasizes Yeats's doctrine that the author must be excluded from normal life, creating his poetry out of his own suffering but displaying what Kermode calls a characteristically Romantic "hopeless anger of an artist in love with action."[1] While this seems true of Yeats's beliefs about the artist's proper "solitude," his creative solipsism, it seems less applicable to the way Yeats saw himself. Yeats was, as he often claimed, a gregarious man who enjoyed his committee-work and public roles. In his later life he tended to blame his early isolation on shyness or even arrogance, asserting that he "did not suffer from the 'poetic temperament,' but from psychological weakness."[2] His belief that much of his life had involved a waste of powers provided a rationale for the idea that as his body aged his imaginative powers increased. There was, moreover, a feeling that he had come late to the sexual life, not so much as physical fact as part of his poetic experience.

This sense of wasted time in the past informs Yeats's purgative thematics in two ways. Firstly, the suffering and deprivation of early life must be come to terms with. If we are wronged in life, he explains in A Vision, then as victims we must "expiate between death and birth the ignorance which made [our sufferings] possible" (AV 238). "Expiation" in such passages implies coming to terms with life's mistakes, totalizing them in a process in which "the vision of that [past] life is completed and accepted" (AV 234). Yeats is close to Freud when he writes of

1. Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 28.
2. "I Became an Author" (1938). Uncollected Prose, II, 506.

reliving as a form of knowledge what once was tyranny" (AV 238). Instinct is converted into tradition, the artist's life into "that perfection which . . . is the work of our own Daimon" (AV 234), a rhetorical whole. Yeats's systematic arrangement of his memories in A Vision and his autobiographies is an example of this process.

On the other hand, Yeats ceased to pay much attention to autobiography after The Bounty of Sweden (1925), insisting instead that he needed to say certain things before he died. There is, correspondingly, a different sense of "expiation" which involves living life to the full, burning off excess passion in life rather than in an after-life. "The more fully a life is lived, the less the need for -- the more complete is -- the expiation" (AV 236). In a letter of 1937 he wrote: "friends die, are estranged, or turn out to be a dream in the mind, and we are poisoned by the ungiven friendship that we hide in our bones" (L 889). At times, Yeats links this aspect of purgation to writing: "If you don't express yourself you walk after you're dead. The great thing is to go empty to your grave," he is reported as saying.[1] To leave anything unsaid is to become an unquiet ghost. The unspent passions which are usually depicted by Yeats as lingering in the bone must be accepted and expressed in a purgation like that described in the magnificent peroration to "A Dialogue of Self and Soul":

> When such as I cast out remorse
> So great a sweetness flows into the breast
> We must laugh and we must sing,
> We are blest by everything,
> Everything we look upon is blest. (VE 479)

The end-product of such a process is not wisdom -- which is specifically rejected in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" -- but a repetition which ensures the continuation of poetry, a fresh influx.

1. Reported by Louise Morgan in W.B. Yeats Interviews and Recollections, ed. E.H. Mikail (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 203.

The ambiguities of the purgatorial process are suggested by Yeats's composition of "Sailing to Byzantium," and the treatment of the "heart" there. In earlier drafts his tutelary sages are asked to "Consume this heart and make it what you were / Unwavering, indifferent, and fanatical" -- anticipating the self-willed intensity of the "fanatic heart" with which he was to end The Winding Stair (1933).[1] The final version of the poem is, however, the familiar plea that the poet be consumed not into Swiftian savage indignation, but rather "Into the artifice of eternity" (VE 408) -- a purgation towards perfection. In the companion poem, "Byzantium," Yeats returns to the "unpurged images" and the "breaking" of images which is also, as Harold Bloom points out, their making, a process both creative and destructive.[2] The same ambiguity is visible elsewhere in Yeats's late career. Lawrence Lipking has pointed out a striking example in a strange incident in late 1927. The story is told in a letter:

> In London I went to a medium called Cooper and on my way called to my people for their special wisdom. The medium gave me a "book test" -- Third book from bottom R shelf -- study -- page 48 or 84. I have only this morning looked it up. The book was the complete Dante designs of Blake. It is not numbered by pages but by plates. Plate 84 is Dante entering the Holy Fire (Purgatorio -- Canto 27). Plate 48 is "The serpent attacking Vanni Fucci." When I looked this up in Dante I found that at the serpent's sting Vanni Fucci is burnt to ashes and this symbolises "the temporal Fire." The medium is the most stupid I know and certainly the knowledge was not in my head. After this and all that has gone before I must capitulate if the dark mind lets me. Certainly we suck always at the eternal dugs. How well too it puts my own mood between spiritual excitement, and the sexual torture and knowledge that are somehow inseparable! (L 730-31)

The point is, Lipking argues, that the two fires are the same.[3] That is not quite true -- Yeats is not saying that purification is achieved through sexual torture ("spiritual excitement" is his phrase) -- but it is indeed the case that the fire is both carnal and spiritual.

1. Bradford, "Yeats's Byzantium Poems: A Study of Their Development," in Yeats, ed. Unterecker, p. 102.
2. Bloom, Yeats, p. 392.
3. Lipking, The Life of the Poet, p. 14.

As Yeats approached his own "last day," it seemed to be the flame itself which captured his attention, as he sought to provide himself with fresh material. The self-consuming nature of the purgative process which is directed towards (rather than following) an ending is described in the famous lyric ending of The Resurrection which Yeats printed in The Tower:[1]

> Everything that man esteems
> Endures a moment or a day.
> Love's pleasure drives his love away,
> The painter's brush consumes his dreams;
> The herald's cry, the soldier's tread
> Exhaust his glory and his might:
> Whatever flames upon the night
> Man's own resinous heart has fed. (VE 438)

Hatred and other negative energies are an important part of such a purgation. As Yeats's gnostic heretic Ribh says, "Hatred of God may bring the soul to God":

> Why should I seek for love or study it?
> It is of God and passes human wit.
> I study hatred with great diligence,
> For that's a passion in my own control,
> A sort of besom that can clear the soul
> Of everything that is not mind or sense. (VE 558)

He too moves through a version of apocalyptic thought -- "There all the gyres converge in one, / There all the planets drop in the Sun" -- to an awareness that only death can bring final knowledge. Instead of theology or knowledge he chooses a purgatorial excitement which is uniquely his own. Hatred, here, is the energy which is a "light" for the "jealous soul." In one of Yeats's sessions with his wife's communicators he asked a question about "further multiple influx," and received the reply "hate God" -- a dialogue which can be related to the questions about blockage and the limits of vision which Yeats asks at the end of A Vision.[2] Ribh's rejection of love ends with the ecstatic questions of the poem's

1. The play was drafted in 1925.
2. See Bloom, Yeats, pp. 411-12.

final stanza, which end not in question marks but in exclamations ("How can she live till in her blood He live!"), his violent doubts themselves a form of vision.

This hatred is an important part of the purgation -- in the sense of intensification rather than purification -- which is apparent in Yeats's later work. The ending approaches, and the past and its values, whether the myth of Georgian Ireland or of Unity of Being, is increasingly molested by doubt. In Yeats's later plays, in particular, there is something like the "burning out" of certain images.[1] "Loss," Yeats's "Body of Fate," operates not at a personal level, but rather in art: the poet's pen consumes his previous writings, feeding off their (partial) rejection. Vendler suggests that "Purgation . . . points ideally toward creation via the mask," but in fact it can become the opposite, part of the demolition of mask and the "forgetting" of what has been created.[2] In the introduction to A Vision, Yeats wrote (as "Aherne") "I think that Plato symbolised by the word 'memory' a relation to the timeless" (AV 54). But in a number of Yeats's late works he purges himself of the "timeless," deliberately forgetting what he had created.[3]

Many critics have underestimated the difficulty and discontinuity of Yeats's last four plays within his dramatic corpus. Written between 1934 and his death, all four are infected by a deep sense of disillusion with the heroic model of his earlier work, and by a sense of frustration and blockage. All contain some element of metatheatre, a play within the

1. "Burning out" recalls the "scorching" which James Joyce used to describe the progress of his writing. See Letters of James Joyce, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber & Faber, 1957), p. 129. Said discusses this figure, Beginnings, p. 253.
2. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, p. 197.
3. James Olney, in his article "Yeats's Diamonic Memory," comments on Yeats's use of "forgetting" in order to distance himself from his own philosophical claims.

play.[1] The initially sceptical attendants who frame A Full Moon in March come to "look and look with understanding eyes" on the ritual they witness (VP 989); The Herne's Egg makes its mocking way from a story about a dog to another story about a donkey; the old man in Purgatory witnesses but does not escape the play's inner drama; and The Death of Cuchulain is introduced by a raging old man who is Yeats's surrogate and ends with a scornful, retrospective song about the Cuchulain-myth. The characters in the play, with the audience, are often deliberately made to doubt the mysteries of Yeats's dramatic art.

I will discuss only one of these plays in detail. The Herne's Egg establishes the tone of much of Yeats's work in his last three years. Written in late 1935/early 1936, it was, like the severed head plays, intended to provide new experience. In the opening scene, a heroic backdrop to the main action, Congal and Aedh fight mechanically while telling the story of two fleas who have "retired and bought a dog. . . . A fat, square, lazy dog, / No sort of scratching dog" (VP 1013-14). The rest of the play shows the absurdity of heroic action in an age that belongs to the dogs. In the fifth scene Congal laments "We fought so long like gentlemen / That we grew blind" (VP 1026). The battle has by then been reduced to a drunken brawl in the kitchen. Aedh having been dispatched with a table-leg, Congal remains confident that even in a squalid age "New weapons, a new leader will be found / And everything begin again." His confidence is misplaced. He is soon caught up in the machinations of Fate (or the Great Herne), brought upon him by his violence and arrogance. In particular, the action undermines his Yeatsian belief that by mating with the woman who he makes his muse he can gain in power; as well as the more general heroic assumption that he can mould his fate through his choices, and Attracta's belief that, like

1. On this aspect of three of them, see Lynn Haims, "Apocalyptic Vision in Three Late Plays by Yeats," SoR, 14 (1978), 46-65.

Emer in The Only Jealousy of Emer, she can influence the fate of Congal's soul after his death.[1] Instead, both characters are baffled spectators who constantly doubt their own place in the action. When prostrated by the thunder of the Herne, Congal resorts to a kind of ventriloquism that leaves the reader uncertain about the real state of his feelings:

> This man
> That's prostrate at my side would say,
> Could he say anything at all,
> That I am terrified by thunder. (VP 1033)

The play ends in a state of semi-hysterical ambiguity. Congal dies "almost screaming in his excitement," uncertain about whether he himself is the fool prophesied to kill him. His belief in his heroic fate is mocked by his eventual rebirth as a donkey. The only true insight that he receives is into the grotesque nature of his position within an ending that he has not imagined for himself. His suicide is almost a protest against the plot's absurdity:

> Here I must sit through the full moon,
> And he will send up fools against me. . . .
> And I, moon-crazed, moon-blind,
> Fighting and wounding, wounded and fighting.
> I never thought of such an end,
> Never be a soldier, Tom;
> Though it begins well, is this a life?
> If this is a man's life, is there any life
> But a dog's life? (VP 1037-38)

There are other ambiguities in the play. Attracta, for example, is "but a puppet," but becomes converted to Congal's cause for no apparent reason (certainly not simply as a result of her "desecration," as the pattern of Yeats's previous play would have suggested).[2] Even about the reality of the Herne, who appears only as thunder, there are questions

1. As Friedman remarks of the earlier poetic hero, "his choice becomes the substance of the drama." Adventures in the Deeps of the Mind, p. 138.
2. Georgio Melchiori, in The Whole Mystery of Art: Pattern into Poetry in the Work of W.B. Yeats (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 195-96, argues that Attracta is comparable to the Salome-like figures in the two "severed head" plays. Yet is its precisely the point that she fails to be inseminated by the spirit of the dead Congal.

unanswered.[1] The play approaches being a self-parody in which the "rite of the hero" has not, as J.R. Moore puts it, "merely entered a new phase," but rather has been fundamentally undermined.[2] In a play which was designed to be "the strangest wildest thing" (L 845), the allegorical action of Yeats's earlier drama is replaced by a deliberate incoherence which seems a function of Yeats's sense that the pattern of his earlier work was no longer sustainable.[3]

Purgatory, the work which Yeats chose to stand at the end of his last volume, is even more radical in its attack on the conventions and themes of Yeats's drama. Many critics attempt to place the play outside the mainstream of his theatre. He wrote it, we are often told, in a mood of particular harshness, unmodified by the vein of affirmation present in his last-written play, The Death of Cuchulain. Moore describes it as going further than any other of Yeats's plays towards "unredeemed and apparently unredeemable blackness."[4] Differences over the interpretation of the play have usually focussed on the issue of whether the play is to be interpreted as an allegory of Ireland's "failure to achieve Unity of Culture" (as one critic puts it), or as a final episode in the drama of the soul.[5] To some extent, our interpretation of it also depends on how

1. Bloom, Yeats, p. 423, points out the possibility of an "agnostic" reading of the play, regarding the Herne as a collective delusion. In contrast to this is T.R. Henn's remark that the Herne is "the god of Yeatsism." Last Essays, p. 164.
2. John Rees Moore, Masks of Love and Death: Yeats as Dramatist (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 284.
3. The play has produced extremely diverse interpretations. Jeffares and Knowland devote much of their entry, A Commentary on the Collected Plays, pp. 266-73, to discussing competing claims. The more determined over-readings tend, I believe, to miss the point that, as Knowland puts it elsewhere, "Mockery runs through the play." See A.S. Knowland W.B. Yeats: Dramatist of Vision (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1983), p. 223.
4. Moore, p. 310.
5. Shirley Newman, Some One Myth: Yeats's Autobiographical Prose (Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1982), p. 130. The debate over historical vs. mythic interpretations has centred on F.A.C. Wilson's attack on John Heath-Stubbs: see Wilson, Yeats and Tradition, pp. 137-61. Vendler, Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays, pp. 196-202, attempts a reconciliation of these views.

closely we identify the play's old man with Yeats. We can see it is Yeats attempting to "get rid of the bitterness, irritation, and hatred my work in Ireland has brought into my soul," as he put it in 1935 (L 836), and thus as purgatorial in the sense of burning off excess passion. Or, we can identify him more closely with its opinions (which are similar to those of On the Boiler) and see Yeats as finding material for a final statement.[1] All these possibilities seem to co-exist in the play: the political interpretation leads us to see him as expressing his sense of entrapment within the myth of mother Ireland (and attempting to escape); while the play is also, arguably, the final comment of the poet on the theme of the family romance, and an examination of the individual's inability to sustain a genealogical model for the inheritance of tradition. Purgatory can best be understood as purgation in the sense which I have described: it represents both Yeats's opinions, and that which he wishes to "get rid of"; its anger is its subject-matter.

3.3.2 Yeat's Last Poems

I have argued that the "ending" was, as an abstract principle, an important part of the way in which Yeats conceived his creativity in old age. Apocalyptic thought provided a model for the ending: a loss of control, a sudden revelation, a movement from fixity and symbolic action to a more fluid and "decreative" state. As I will show, such a movement is discernible within the individual volumes which Yeats wrote.

It is possible to analyse Yeats's individual poems in terms of closure. Lee Zimmerman has done so to a number of poems, concluding that his ending questions balance irresolution and assertion in a way which

1. On the latter possibility, see Bloom, Yeats, pp. 426-28; and Sandra F. Siegel, "Yeats's Quarrel with Himself: The Design and Argument of Yeats's On the Boiler," BRH, 81 (1975), 367-68.

reflects the "vacillation" elsewhere in his work.[1] His endings, as Yeats puts it, "embody" the always ambiguous truth. The bodily metaphor suggests the way in which Yeats makes a number of what I have called "gestures" towards his audience, of a kind which he does not make in his early work -- though we could see such a gesture in a poem as early as "A Coat" in Responsibilities (1914). In the later poetry there is a gestural element in the testamentary passages in poems like "The Tower" and "Under Ben Bulben"; in the summational or retrospective aspects of works like "The Death of Cuchulain"; and the direct confrontation with death in a few other poems, some of which I will examine here.

The actual gestures which Yeats directs at his audience are something of a problem. Many of his readers find Yeats's later rhetoric harsh. His dictum that we make rhetoric from our quarrel with others, and poetry from our struggle with ourselves is often invoked to dismiss its worst excesses. MacDonald Emslie, examining what he calls the "Gestures in Scorn of an Audience" in Yeats's work, concludes that those which work well refer back to the scene which the poem as a whole establishes.[2] The scope of such reference in Yeats's later work is, however, wider than Emslie suggests; the "that gestures" in phrases like "That is no country for old men" do not simply refer to the scene of the poem. They call up all of Yeats's past work, often as justification, but equally often to dismiss what he has written of or taken as his subject, the Ireland to which the "That" of "Sailing to Byzantium" refers, for example, or the repeated "thats" of "The Circus Animals' Desertion":

1. Lee Zimmerman, "Singing Amid Uncertainty: Yeats's Closing Questions," in The Yeats Annual, No. 2, ed. Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 35-45. Zimmerman pays little attention to the sense of closure in Yeats's career, rather than individual poems.
2. MacDonald Emslie, "Gestures in Scorn of an Audience," in W.B. Yeats 1865-1965: Centenary Essays, ed. D.E.S. Maxwell and S.B. Bushrui (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. 117.

"Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot" (VE 629). The "old themes" he enumerates there -- the reference to "all that painted crew" in his last play -- such gestures are a product of age and refer not so much to an audience as to Yeats's own work, and are a part of his struggle with himself. They are as retrospective as they are prospective. Yeats himself saw such a struggle as central to true poetry. He wrote in 1923: "'Is not style,' as Synge once said to me, 'born out of the shock of new materials'" (A 531), and one could add that in order to produce new materials, the old must be disposed of.

Yeats's own theory of gestures was based on his drama, and drew particularly on Gordon Craig's work on acting technique.[1] Gestures, for Yeats, removed the player from the mundane world, producing an essential expression of human nature and action. In his 1904 essay "First Principles" Yeats opposes "picture," which is the objective depiction of experience, with "gesture":

> but when Lucifer stands among his friends, when Villon sings his dead ladies to so gallant a rhythm, when Timon makes his epitaph, we feel no sorrow, for life herself has made one of her eternal gestures, has called up into our hearts her energy that is eternal delight. In Ireland, where the tide of life is rising, we turn not to picture-making, but to the imagination of personality -- to drama, gesture. (E 163)

Edward Engleberg in The Vast Design has used this opposition of "picture" and "gesture" to describe an overall movement in Yeats's work.[2] But if we maintain a narrower scope, we notice that Yeats often discusses such "gestures" in the context of last scenes in tragedy, as in his "General Introduction," where he refers to the plays of Shakespeare in their endings: "imagination must dance" (E&I 523). It is important that the

1. In particular, Craig's description of the statue-like "übermarionette," freed from individual weakness, working through "symbolic gesture." See James W. Flannery, W.B. Yeats and the Idea of a Theatre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 263-66.
2. Engleberg, ch. 3. Dwight Eddins, in Yeats: The Nineteenth Century Matrix (University: University of Alabama Press, 1971), p. 5, uses a similar opposition, "design" and "drama," drawn from a 1913 letter.

context of this is the expression of a sense of impersonal joy in which the poet or player's personality is abstracted. In an 1903 essay on the "Emotion of Multitude," Yeats insists that rhetoric is "but the will trying to do the work of the imagination" (E&I 251). The "emotion of multitude" is the relationship with an implied audience which is set up within a work, generated either by the presence of a chorus or the use of symbolism; it is not the result of a direct appeal.

This is the standard by which Yeats's own final gestures should be judged. We should examine them not as isolated rhetorical figures, but as dramatic realizations of the personality of the poet. The fact that Yeats's later volumes have a coherent dramatic structure has been pointed out by a number of writers. Hugh Kenner perceives a "dramatic progression" in The Tower, from the renunciation to the possession of a disembodied wisdom in "All Souls' Night." Kenner also suggests that a similar progression is visible in The Wild Swans at Coole, and sees its justification in both cases in Yeats's theories of the construction of "the oeuvre, the deliberated artistic Testament."[1] Kenner does not sketch this "dramatic structure" in any detail, but it is, I think, present in many of Yeats's later volumes. The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933), for example, moves from its opening historical and philosophical poems through a series of fragmentary lyrics (like "Oil and Blood") which dwell with sexuality and change, to the personal meditations of the Coole Park poems, and a group of poems which dwell on death as an individual experience. The same rhythm is repeated in the second part of the volume. The situation is, of course, complicated by the fact that Yeats was constantly re-ordering his volumes, especially in gathering the smaller private press publications into larger groupings for the Macmillan volumes; and Yeats's exact intentions are often the

1. Kenner, "The Sacred Book of the Arts," pp. 10-12, 19-21.

subject of debate (he seems, for example to have had a larger scheme of "Poems 1933-1937" in mind at some stage).[1] I will discuss the ordering only of the last two volumes which Yeats arranged himself.

The first of these, the Cuala Press New Poems (1938) opens with "The Gyres" and "Lapis Lazuli," two poems in Yeats's most didactic and monumental mode. It quickly moves on, however, from the Chinese carving of the latter poem to the short deflationary piece "Imitated From the Japanese," and the apology for madness in "Sweet Dancer." These two poems set up a rhythm: the old man of seventy (Yeats's age) who has never "danced for joy" confronts the "sweet dancer" (Margot Ruddock). The sexual theme is continued in "The Three Bushes," which (as I argued above) fragments its central story into a number of supplementary lyrics dealing not with the platonic model but with naked lust. There follows the famous evocation of passion "Here at life's end" in "An Acre of Grass": "Grant me an old man's frenzy, / Myself I must remake" (VE 576). The attack of fixed truth and achievement is raised to an apocalyptic pitch in "What Then?" The next group of poems deal with personal memory and emotion, including "Beautiful Lofty Things," "A Crazed Girl," and "To Dorothy Wellesley"; and a further group deals with Irish history: "The Curse of Cromwell," the two Roger Casement poems, "The O'Rahilly," "Come Gather round me, Parnellites." If we interpret this progression, it seems as if the argument of "The Gyres" itself is being recapitulated: the philosophical truths enshrined in stone and number decay or are desecrated into lust and fragmented memory. In the poems which follow, the process continues. "The Wild Old Wicked Man" is the first of a number of personae which include The Pilgrim, The Spirit Medium, the storyteller of "Colonel Martin," The Man in the Golden

1. See Appendix 2; and, on the "Poems 1933-37," Warwick Gould's letter, TLS, 10 Aug. 1984, p. 893, and Richard J. Finneran's reply, Aug. 31, p. 969.

Breastplate, and the Drunken Man, all of whom praise or announce the coming apocalyptic moment. The poem returns to Yeats's own voice with the reconstructive "message" of wildness in "Those Images" and the extended meditation of the occasional piece, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited." The latter is not popular among Yeats's readers -- T.R. Henn's remark that it is "over-contrived" is perhaps representative -- but within the context of a "purging" of the images of a lifetime the emotions of the aged poet are more comprehensible.[1] Yeats sees "an Ireland / The poets have imagined, terrible and gay," and what he sees shakes him into confrontation and recapitulation: "My heart recovering with covered eyes" as he puts it, exploiting the ambiguity of "recovering" to suggest the dual nature of the purgative process. The poem thus plots an uneasy personal progress towards "recovery," and while its ending seems strong and Yeats asks his reader to "trace" Ireland's "lineaments" in the faces of his friends (recalling the "ancient lineaments blotted out" of "The Gyres"), it is a recovery which comes only in "ending." In speaking of it, Yeats imagines his own death and dismisses his own work as the repository of the complexity of memory. His reader must go to the gallery and in a sense <u>be</u> Yeats (as Yeats suggests that the Irish must do of Cuchulain in his play) in order to understand.

The volume's final poem is "Are You Content?" Again, its immediate subjects are lineage and judgement. Yeats calls up his ancestors to pronounce upon him, asserting that "Eyes spiritualized by death can judge, / I cannot, but I am not content" (VE 604). But the poem's argument is predicated upon an opposition between writing and the wisdom of those ancestors. In the first stanza Yeats asks whether "I, that put

1. Henn, <u>Last Essays</u>, p. 169.

it into words, / [Have] Spoilt what old loins have sent?" The final stanza abrogates the wisdom which Yeats had always seen in Browning's "old hunter":

> Infirm and aged I might stay
> In some good company,
> I who ahave always hated work,
> Smiling at the sea,
> Or demonstrate in my own life
> What Robert Browning meant
> By an old hunter talking with Gods;
> But I am not content.

The volume as a whole thus moves from philosophy and exhortation to sexuality and a preoccupation with an increasingly fragmented memory in which short lyrics, thoughts, expressions of transitory aspects of personality appear. Its attempt at a "strong" ending is itself a celebration of incompleteness, and the final poem insists that old age can neither judge nor achieve tranquility. It assumes the body of Yeats's work (including the "Half legendary men" of stanza two of the final poem) in order to move beyond it.

On the ordering of the final volume which Yeats oversaw, the Cuala Press Last Poems and Two Plays, we can to a large extent rely on the excellent analysis of the now restored ordering which Stanley Sultan provides in his Yeats at His Last (1975).[1] Sultan argues that the volume opens with an attempt to suppress one of the irreducable contraries of poetry. "Under Ben Bulben," "Three Songs to the One Burden," "The

1. The original ordering from Yeats's holograph table of contents was first supplied by Curtis Bradford, "The Order of Yeats's Last Poems," MLN, 76 (1961) 515-16, and in his "Yeats's "Last Poems' Again" (1966), in The Dolmen Press Centenary Papers MCMLXV, ed. Liam Miller (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1968), pp. 259-88. Richard J. Finneran, in his The Poems of W.B. Yeats: A New Edition (London: Macmillan, 1983) adopts Bradford's ordering, confirming his findings in his Editing Yeats's Poems (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 65. However, in an article forthcoming in the Yeats Annual, No. 5, Phillip Marcus questions the finality of Yeats's ordering of the Cuala Press volume, and argues that Yeats would have reordered the Last Poems when publishing it in the context of a Collected Poems. I discuss this article in Appendix 2.

Black Tower" and other poems in the first half of the volume are impersonal and public, many of them in the prospective mode: directed at the ideal future audience who are the "indomitable Irishry." But gradually the mode is altered: "a relationship evolves between the new expressed feelings of the man, and the assured public declarations of the Poet and Thinker which they interrupt."[1] Sultan argues that the voice of the human, dying poet emerges with "A Bronze Head." He contrasts the impersonal description of death in "Under Ben Bulben" ("Yeats is laid") with the humanity of Yeats's contemplation of his end in later poems like "The Apparitions" and "The Man and the Echo." The former is particularly striking, with the famous last stanza which begins: "When a man grows old his joy / Grows more deep day after day" (VE 624); while the latter duplicates the progress of the volume as a whole in its interrupted oracle:

> O Rocky Voice,
> Shall we in that great night rejoice?
> What do we know but that we face
> One another in this place?
> But hush, for I have lost the theme,
> Its joy or night seem but a dream;
> Up there some hawk or owl has struck,
> Dropping out of sky or rock,
> A stricken rabbit is crying out,
> And its cry distracts my thought. (VE 633)

The appeal to the audience in this poem ("hush") is a gesture which directs attention from the public voice to a private meditation on the moment of death. The volume ends, incongruously for some readers, with "Politics," a poem in which a politician wishes that he had had more life: "But O that I were young again / And held her in my arms!" (VE 631). In a letter of January 1932 Yeats had predicted that this would be his last thought, writing: "I shall be a sinful man to the end, and think upon my death-bed of all the nights I wasted in my youth" (L 790). The

1. Sultan, p. 38.

volume as a whole thus moves from the public gesture to a personal encounter with memory and death; from the prospective to the retrospective and the immediate.

In the sixth poem of the volume, "In Tara's Halls," Yeats had described the "ideal" death of a heroic age, in a passage which conforms precisely to the prescription for the ideal death of Medieval literature which Philippe Ariès prescribes:

> He bade, his hundred and first year at end,
> Diggers and carpenters make grave and coffin;
> Saw that the grave was deep, the coffin sound,
> Summoned the generations of his house,
> Lay in the coffin, stopped his breath and died. (VE 609)

The Last Poems enacts a different form of death. But it has also been argued that the volume is modelled on Yeats's "official" philosophy, "Under Ben Bulben" providing the funeral dirge, and the rest of the volume representing the posthumous voice of the poet.[1] It is not, I think, possible to link to it in detail the processes described in A Vision; a dramatic analysis is most useful.

There are, nevertheless, a number of poems in which Yeats seems to focus on his sense of personal lateness and purge himself -- in the sense outlined in the previous section -- of his own poetic apparatus. "The Circus Animals' Desertion" is an obvious such poem. Another is "High Talk," with its celebration of the metaphoric "stilts" which Yeats had earlier associated with nineteenth century rhetoric, and its allusion to the last of the Old Testament prophets, who had spoken of burning and healing, and cried against those who had wearied the Lord with their

1. Frank Tuohy suggests that the poems which follow it represent the "dreaming back" described in A Vision. See his Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 220. No such process is, in fact discernible: the poems do not review the poet's life in any systematic sense, and become more rather than less personal as the volume progresses (the Dreaming Back involves a progression away from the personal). As I suggested earlier, A Vision can be most fruitfully be interpreted as an allegory of the fate of the corpus after death, rather than of poetic experience and the fate of the poet.

words. Perhaps the most interesting such poem is "The Black Tower." The last poem he wrote, its theme is in part the persistence of passions up to and beyond death, and in part the nature of heroic values. The men in the Tower represent, as Jon Stallworthy points out, "the dormant Spirit of Ireland," combining the martial virtues with those of the goatherd (like the old man of Yeats's early "Shepherd and Goatherd").[1] Yet it is less certain that, as Stallworthy adds, they "will awake and inspire the people to attain their former dignity and power." There is a possible irony in the imperatives of the opening stanza, and in the position of the "oath-bound men." To be bound by an oath after death is to remain unpurged, and in the historical context, to fail to adjust to the new gyre with its "banners." This suspicion is exacerbated by the chorus:

> There in the tomb the dark grows blacker,
> But wind comes up from the shore:
> They shake when the winds roar,
> Old bones upon the mountain shake. (VE 636)

If the men in the black tower are in a kind of purgatory, then they are shaken by the wind that often suggests influxes of occult or intense emotion in Yeats's work. The "Old bones" refers to the persistence of those passions, that which is most elemental and enduring in human life. In The Dreaming of the Bones (1919) Yeats wrote "Have not old writers said / That dizzy dreams can spring / From the dry bones of the dead?" (VP 763), while in "Three Things" a "bone upon the shore" remembers its past passions. Bones are also the repositories of song in poems like "The Wild Old Wicked Man" and "A Prayer for Old Age": "He that sings a lasting song / Thinks in a marrow-bone" (VE 553). The sources of creativity and the survival of passion are thus linked in the figure of the bones. Yeats himself analyses the theme in his introduction to The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (1936), asking "does not intellectual

1. Stallworthy, Between the Lines, p. 228.

analysis in one of its moods identify man with that which is most persistent in his body?"[1] For modern man "since Poincaré" (whom both here and in On the Boiler represents the beginning of a primary age) the bones of the dead cannot be dealt with: they have no "human" meaning.[2]

In the context of this poem, the community of dead poets which may be Ireland, or perhaps the Romantic tradition (as the use of the tower in this context might suggest[3]), have been dispossessed of any relationship with the modern age. Like the old man in Purgatory, they are locked into their own legends: "the bones of the dead are not dead but accursed, accursed because unchanging."[4] The wind that sweeps past the bones in "The Black Tower" thus shakes them because it represents old passions, but also the passing of the ground of those passions in antithetical age. The "tower's old cook" who is the presiding genius of the place "Swears that he hears the king's great horn," maintaining some contact with the outside world. Ellmann suggests wryly that the cook represents the poetic imagination;[5] but he could be Yeats himself, dealing in the scraps and morsels which, twenty years earlier in "Anima Hominis" he had predicted would be his final sustenance.[6] The small birds he catches are reminiscent of the butterflys which Yeats liked to say were "truth," the tokens of a poetic life that even at the very end found material, while the heroic dead sleep on.

Finally, it is possible to see this purgative process in Yeats's

1. The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, pp. xx-xxi.
2. See On the Boiler, p. 25.
3. The tower has been compared to those in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo" and Browning's "Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower Game," both the scene of a final confrontation with death. On the occult associations of the Tower, see Henn, The Lonely Tower, p. 339.
4. The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, p. xx.
5. Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats, p. 209.
6. See the passage concluding "Anima Hominis" (M 342). Stallworthy points out that the cook was, in the drafts, associated with "Old Tom," the wise fool.

final volume beginning as early as "Under Ben Bulben" itself. It is not possible to discuss Yeats's "last poems" without this poem, which has been canonized as Yeats's epitaph. Indeed, so strong is the force of such canonization that, even after the fact was established that Yeats placed it at the beginning of his final volume, some critics have argued that in the context of a Collected Poems it should be placed at the end.[1] This contradicts Yeats's standard practice in shifting material from volume publication to a collected format; and also contrasts sharply with the dramatic portrayal of death which I have outlined. Even within the poem there is a disunity between the official "Creed" (the title of an early prose draft) -- a public declaration -- and the desire of the poet to write his own epitaph.[2] Yeats the philosopher preaches of "race and soul," and measurement," but when in section IV he reaches contemporary Ireland he can only abandon the "greater dream" which the gyres have left in the past, and produce a rather vague and colloquial condemnation of misshapen poetry: "Scorn the sort now growing up / All out of shape from toe to top" (VE 639). What he recommends instead -- "Hard-riding country gentlemen" and so on -- never seems a reality, and is only explicable as Yeats's purging of his most lofty expectations.[3]

After the public, testamentary, rhetoric comes the famous description of Yeats's burial -- almost a threnody -- in which the brutal-mindedness of what precedes it is replaced by the personal:

1. As well as Marcus's article cited above, there is the argument of Joseph Ronsley in his article on "Yeats as an Autobiographical Poet," in Myth and Reality in Irish Literature, pp. 147-48, who reports the testimony of Michael Yeats on the subject.
2. Stallworthy, Vision and Revision, p. 161. The testamentary part of the poem was first called "Creed," then "His Convictions," and finally "Under Ben Bulben" -- a progression from beliefs to grave like that which the poem as a whole offers.
3. In the poem's drafts, the anger is even greater, and the gravestone at one point is under threat of simply being something which "braggs [sic] of the country's loss." Ibid., p. 169.

"Yeats" rather than the Irish Poet, "laid" rather than "thrust" or "beaten," connected to real middle-class ancestors rather than mythical noblemen or beggars, and concerned not with power and song, but with an inscription, "no conventional phrase," the poet's epitaph:

> Under bare Ben Bulben's head
> In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
> An ancestor was rector there
> Long years ago, a church stands near,
> By the road an ancient cross.
> No marble, no conventional phrase;
> On limestone quarried near the spot
> By his command these words are cut:
>
> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by! (VE 640)

Many sources have been suggested for the epitaph. It has been related to the essay on Rilke which prompted it, to the "Abi Viator" of Swift's epitaph, and to the vignettes on the Mappa Mundi which Yeats saw at Hereford Cathedral.[1] Within the body of Yeats's work, we can refer it to the numerous descriptions of the horsemen of the Sidhe, though perhaps more illuminatingly to the apocalyptic "high horse riderless, / Though mounted in the saddle Homer rode" of "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" (VE 492).[2] The horse in the latter poem represented a tradition with no inheritors, suggesting that the "horseman" of the epitaph is at best a ghost -- rather than one of the Irish gentry, as it is often said to be. There is another possible source which has very seldom been

1. See Henn, The Lonely Tower, pp. 335-37; and G.R. Crone, "Horseman, Pass by," N&Q, ns 16 (1969), 256-57. Easily the most extensive examination of the poem's sources is James Lovic Allen's Yeats's Epitaph: A Key to Symbolic Unity in his Life and Work (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). However, Allen's scholarship is occasionally suspect, and the book suffers from its determination to treat the epitaph as a "symbolic key"; it is at best a useful source-book.
2. Allen, p. 97, sees "as many as five interrelated imports" in the horseman, relating it in particular to the Black and White Horses described in a prophetic fragment of Horton's which was linked by Yeats to the origins of A Vision, and also to the horse and rider image for body and soul which Plato used.

noticed.[1] In Thus Spoke Zarathustra there is a section "On Passing By," in which Zarathustra departs from the Great City and says to the fool outside:

> This precept, however, give I unto thee, in parting, thou fool: where one can no longer love, there one should -- pass by! --[2]

The parallel with Nietzsche's passage, which (given Yeats's extensive use of Nietzsche) may well be an echo, suggests that the art of "passing-by" is practiced by those who no longer have business within the citadel of human affairs. It is a condemnation not only of what Nietzsche calls the "great city," but also of the fool in Yeats, who rants against its corruption rather than seeking a proud isolation.[3] The epitaph suggests that he should turn away from the testament, and consign it to its fate, composing himself for his own end. "Under Ben Bulben" points away from its own doctrine and high anger, its status as a binding testament, towards the author's solitude and human fate.

Yeats's fascination with endings, rehearsed since his earliest poetry, thus results not so much in the final wisdom which is the overt

1. The only reference to this possible echo is, so far as I can tell, K.H. Southworth in "'The Tradition of Myself': Approaches to Personal Experience in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats," M.Phil. Diss. London, 1980, p. 248. We do know that Yeats had read Nietzsche enthusiastically since around 1902, and that he reread him in 1936-37. See, in particular, Otto Bohlmann, Yeats and Nietzsche: An Exploration of the Major Nietzchean Echos in the Writings of William Butler Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1982), ch. 5, for a discussion of Yeats's use of Thus Spoke Zarathustra.
2. I quote from Thomas Common's translation, in The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T.N. Foulis, 1909), IV, 217. Yeats's earliest and most passionate reading of Nietzsche was in a selection of his own translations made by Common in 1901, though it cannot be precisely determined what editions he subsequently used. This passage is, however, very similar in all translations of Thus Spoke Zarathustra.
3. Allen, p. 74 ff. argues that Yeats identifies himself with the horseman, and that the imperative is addressed to himself. As he points out, a number of other commentators have seen this identification.

purpose of "Under Ben Bulben" as in an enactment of the whole process of literary endings. His last volume, and the poem itself, presents an encounter of wisdom and passion, a purgation, and a final sense of release as the poet is freed from his poem. Though the reader is arrested in the opening of "Under Ben Bulben," the poem ends not with the traditional sta viator, but instead with the three lines which form Yeats's monumental inscription: an epitaph which baffles as much as it elucidates, which is ambiguous in its address, and which forces the reader into his or her own appreciation of the obscure art of "passing-by." Yeats, at the very end, escapes us.

Chapter 4 : Wallace Stevens

Stevens' later poetry has always presented critics with problems. In 1972, surveying the field, Irvin Ehrenpreis suggested that "the precise nature of his development -- the change that took place in his work from 1923 to 1955 -- has yet to be described in authoritative detail."[1] Eight years later Frank Kermode commented that "The last poetry of Wallace Stevens, which may be his greatest, seems not to have found the critic who can speak for it" -- though both critics are willing enough to make a few suggestions pending the arrival of the prophet.[2] Such pronouncements seem less indicative of the possibility of an authoritative account of the late Stevens than they are of a peculiar mixture of attitudes which Stevens himself did a great deal to foster. On the one hand there is the obscurity and "openess" of much of his late work, the way in which it defies easy characterization. On the other hand there is Stevens' own belief that his work did have a shape, a number of set aims, and that it could be understood.

In this respect, Stevens' combination of obscurity and resonance has provided both a stimulus and a challenge to post-war American criticism. Stevens, like the New Critics, believed that a poem has a meaning which is placed there by its author and is therefore, potentially at least, accessible to the reader. Despite his avowal of the "complicated" nature of poetry ("it cannot be made suddenly to drop all its rags and stand out naked, fully disclosed. Everything is complicated . . ." [L 303]) he was willing to explain, even paraphrase, at length for correspondents like Hi Simons and Renato Poggioli. To Peter H. Lee he wrote that the

1. Irvin Ehrenpreis, ed. Wallace Stevens: A Critical Anthology (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 96.
2. Frank Kermode, "Dwelling Poetically in Connecticut," in Wallace Stevens: A Celebration, ed. Frank Doggett and Robert Buttel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 256. Subsequently referred to as A Celebration.

difficulties of his English were those of his own "distinct tongue" rather than any real obscurity: "No one tries to be more lucid than I do" (L 873). The paradigm for poetry is therefore closer to translation than an hermeneutics for Stevens. He did not readily believe in a poem having hidden depths, since "the subconscious creates nothing" (L 465), it can only arrange the given of reality. He was relatively insensitive to the potential uncertainties of his work.

Critics have often reproduced this position in producing "strong" readings of Stevens' work, inevitably at variance with each other. On the question of the shape of his late career, a number of writers have seen it as essentially flat: a fleshing out of the "Notes," a supplement of his mature phase.[1] Others see a cyclic career in Stevens, often drawing on Stevens' own seasonal metaphors. Some see his late career as a destructive moment which turns the imagination against itself in the manner of Yeats.[2] The most recent and ambitious work on Stevens" late career, Charles Berger's Forms of Farewell, argues that Stevens responded to the war (particularly atomic warfare) in "The Auroras of Autumn," before entering a period of peace and reconciliation ("An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"), and a final period in which he writes on death and poetic survival.[3] Not all these interpretations are, of course,

1. Versions of this static view can be seen in A. Walton Litz, Introspective Voyager: The Poetic Development of Wallace Stevens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. vii; to some extent in J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 259; and Joseph N. Riddell, "Metaphoric Staging: Stevens' Beginning Again of the 'End of the Book,'" in A Celebration, p. 317. Roy Harvey Pearce, in "Toward Decreation: Stevens and the 'Theory of Poetry,'" in A Celebration, p. 301, suggests that Stevens' late philosophy (rather than his poetry) was fixed by "The Auroras of Autumn."
2. The cyclic view is espoused by Thomas J. Hines, The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens; Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger (London: Associated University Presses, 1976), pp. 19-20; and Diane Wood Middlebrook, Walt Whitman and Wallace Stevens (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 203ff.; among others.
3. Charles Berger, Forms of Farewell: The Late Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

mutually exclusive. But even on the points of crisis there is a good deal of disagreement. Helen Vendler sees the 1945 "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion" as a point of change, Harold Bloom the more transcendent "As at a Theatre" (1950); whereas Samuel Hines sees Transport to Summer as initiating a final phase in 1947 -- to take only a few examples.[1]

4.1 Stevens' Late Career

I will in this chapter's opening section take a slightly different point of entry to Stevens' late career from that used with Hardy and Yeats, concentrating first on the peculiar problem of Stevens' "two careers" and his suspicion of the profession of poetry. I will then, as with Hardy and Yeats, move on to discuss his sense of his own agedness, the images which seem to provide a special focus to his late career, the style of his old age, and his "endings." There will be no attempt to "unify" this picture of the poet: in many ways Stevens' late works deny the possibility of such unities. In the same spirit, there will be no synoptic treatment of the major long poems. Stevens in a letter of 1952 denied that he would write a single great work of his old age (L 755). In fact, the shorter poems of his later years -- some of which are denied entry to the supposedly canonical The Palm at the End of the Mind -- are often more revealing, less doctrinal.[2] One of Stevens' tenets in old age

1. Harold Bloom, Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 338; Hines, p. 138; Helen Vendler, Part of Nature, Part of Us (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 42-53.
2. The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play by Wallace Stevens, ed. Holly Stevens (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972). The paperback edition comes with Harold Bloom's assertion that it contains "every shorter poem of lasting value," a statement which seems to me to be entirely indefensible.

is that the poet is to be found in the flicker of his metaphors rather than his achieved structures, and the shorter late poems often demonstrate the processes of composition and decomposition at their most visible.

4.1.1 Stevens' Two Careers

In 1901 the young Wallace Stevens faced a crisis in his career. His plans to support himself as a journalist while writing were failing. By the autumn he had accepted that if he was to earn his living, then law school was the best option. He graduated in 1903, and after a false start in New York in 1904-8 he entered the employ of the American Bonding Co. From there he joined the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Co. in 1916. He moved to Hartford in the same year and retained the same employers for the rest of his life. This career sketch is unremarkable except, of course, that it belongs to one of the century's major poets, and the oddity of a poet who had such an employment is a commonplace of Stevens' reception in his own time, and even of later criticism.[1] In most accounts of his career it is simply accepted: this poet was an insurance executive who wrote in his spare time; his two careers occasionally clashed (as in the period 1924-29, when Stevens more or less gave up writing in order to concentrate on business), but he still managed to produce a substantial body of work outside of his life as an executive, in the quiet hours of an introspective and shy poet.[2]

1. Other writers have been particularly suspicious of a poet so manifestly part of the "Establishment." Mary McCarthy's parody of Stevens is well known; a more recent example is Robert Bly's "Wallace Stevens and Dr. Jekyll," in American Poets in 1976, ed. William Heyen (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill, 1976), pp. 4-19.
2. Helen Vendler, for example, suggests that poetry and work "remained in uneasy coexistence" for all of Stevens' life -- an assertion which ignores Stevens' own attempts to close the gap between the two in later life. Vendler, Part of Nature, p. 18.

This study, however, has its beginning in the idea of a literary career, a life in writing. The fact that Stevens was determined to make his life as a businessman does affect his writing, and the relationship between Stevens the executive and Stevens the solipsistic, meditative poet is relevant to the structure of his career. Of central importance is the question of exactly what a man is to excel at, and how. Literature for the young Stevens seems to have partaken of most of the idealism of the 1890s, and poetry in particular existed in a privileged sphere.[1] The divisions between it and the world of work were savage, and perhaps exacerbated by the protestant ethic which is so visible in Stevens' letters to and from his father in the period up to 1901.[2] In the city, poetry threatens to become an aspect of melancholy. The distinction between these two realms of being -- the Sunday walks in the country; the progress of a career in the city -- remained absolute for a long time. As he wrote to Elsie Stevens in 1910, "The country is one thing, the city another -- I like them well-defined, separate. It is sentimental to mingle them."[3] At its most mundane level, Stevens' attitude was an acknowledgement of the contemporary prejudice that the writing of verses was "lady-like" (L 180). But more fundamentally, he simply cannot see the writing of verse as a career, and his depiction of writing constantly slides towards an emphasis on its inability to compromise with the world, its dandified tendencies. The diary itself reproduces this form, as it alternates between working and walking; between comments which belong outside his daytime existence and

1. See Robert Buttel, "Wallace Stevens at Harvard: Some Origins of His Theme and Style," in The Act of the Mind, pp. 29-57.
2. For an interesting commentary on Stevens and the double bind of his father's liberal individualism, see Alan Filreis, "Wallace Stevens and the Crisis of Authority," AL, 56 (1984), 560-78.
3. Letter of 7 June 1910. Quoted in Holly Stevens, Souvenirs and Prophecies: The Young Wallace Stevens (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1977), p. 249 (Not in Letters).

anticipate later concerns, and those typical of a struggling young attorney at the beginning of the century.

Nevertheless, Stevens continued to write, and by 1923 had produced enough poems for "that damned serious affair," a volume of poetry.[1] Harmonium is a carefully prepared work, "veracious page on page, exact" as "The Comedian as the Letter C" has it. But its poetry retains the flavour of Stevens' Sundays, and its fairly enthusiastic reception was not matched by hard sales. Stevens was disappointed, and turned to his business career after 1923, enforcing the primacy of the office.

He began to write again around 1930, issuing a revised Harmonium in 1931, and making contact with a number of new literary people. Re-starting was not easy: "Writing again after a discontinuance seems to take one back to the beginning rather than the point of discontinuance," he wrote (L 265); and in a number of letters of this period he muses on the fact that "One of the essential conditions to the writing of poetry is impetus. That is a reason for thinking that to be a poet at all one ought to be a poet constantly" (L 274). In the same letter he argues:

> It was a great loss to poetry when people began to think that the professional poet was an outlaw or an exile. Writing poetry is a conscious activity. While poems may very well occur, they had very much better be caused.

The reader should have a suspicion of such pronouncements. Stevens' attitude towards poetry is always ambiguous, and later in life he both argues for and against "professionalism" in writing, depending on the context. But here his description of the poet's activity seems to indicate a desire to work at it, to have a career as a poet which is not just an occasional midnight effusion. The play of businesslike and more romantic descriptions of the writer's career is particularly visible in

1. Letter dated 9 April (191?), quoted by William Carlos Williams in "Kora in Hell," in Imaginations, ed. Webster Schott (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1970), p. 15.

a number of letters which Stevens wrote to Ronald Lane Latimer in the mid-1930s. In them, Stevens characteristically alternates between an emphasis on order ("system of some sort is inescapable") and freedom ("No man of imagination is prim" [L 300]). In one letter he will argue both that "everything has its origin in externals" and that "egoism" drives the poet on; an internal force (L 305). At times, he attempts to balance these possibilities:

> If one could truly play the role of poet with all the books, giving one's lifetime to it, leading the special life that a poet should lead, reaching out after every possible experience, questions of this sort would be commonplace. They are, in fact, commonplaces now, but I am dealing with my own experience. I think that things come from both within and from without. (L 302).

But there is in this period a tremendous counter-pressure, a desire not to divorce himself from the daily round. To his remark to Latimer that "the few things that I have already done have been preliminary," he added the comment "Besides, I very much like the idea of something ahead; I don't care to make exhaustive effort to reach it, to see what it is" (L 333). There always remains the necessity to "chop the sullen psaltery" as he put it in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," explaining to a correspondent that it meant "to write with difficulty, because of excess realism in life" (L 360). As he came to realize, such a mixed state of being was desirable. He wrote to Hi Simon: "What keeps one alive is the fury of the desire to get somewhere with all this, in the midst of all the other things one has to do" (L 350). A few days later he added an account of his earlier decision:

> About the time when I, personally, began to feel round for a new romanticism, I might naturally have been expected to start on a new cycle. Instead of doing so, I began to feel that I was on the edge: that I wanted to get to the centre: that I was isolated, and that I wanted to share the common life. (L 352)

The life of the poet is too extreme, at least as it is conceived in the

romantic paradigm. Moreover, too much self-consciousness or primness is debilitating: "When the imagination is moving rapidly, it identifies things only approximately, and to stop and define them would be to stop altogether" (L 361). He remarked of Delmore Schwartz -- as he was later to remark of Howard Nemerov -- that Schwartz was "perhaps too keen" about his poetry, too much of a professional; adding that the poet must "preserve feeling" in order not to dry up (L 356). The idea of a career in poetry is a dangerous one, and must to an extent be repressed, the source guarded. "Poetry is a passion, not a habit. This passion nourishes itself on reality" (L 364). "Reality," in the context of his career, both nourishes and blocks his creativity.

This mode of thought can be traced back to the beginning of Stevens' career, particularly a well-known entry in his journal at Harvard. We can substitute "reality" or "work" for "study":

> There must exist a place to spring from -- a refuge from the heights, an anchorage of thought. Study gives this anchorage: study ties you down; and it is the occasional wil[l]ful release from this voluntary bond that gives the soul its occasional over-powering sense of lyric freedom and effort. (L 27)

"It is necessary to any originality to have the courage to be an amateur," he later noted (OP 169). Being a student or amateur is one thing; being a professional or scholar is another. But in the early 1940s -- in his sixties, that is -- Stevens began to work through some of the tensions implied by his two careers in precisely these terms of student and scholar. The focus of this resolution was, for a period, the poetry chair at Harvard which his friend Henry Church was attempting to establish in his will. The poetry chair could be called the poet's office: it leant a business-like status to the occupation of poet, making a profession of it. As it was first conceived, it was to be a compensation for a lost Europe during the war. Eventually, Stevens

entered into a correspondence with Church about how Church might endow the chair in his will, and about possible candidates for the poetry lectures which Church sponsored: "What is wanted is essentially a scholar," but a scholar with "an extremely aggressive mind," having the dynamicism which Stevens did not, in his earlier life, associate with poetry (L 376). In his "Memorandum" he specifies that the incumbent should concentrate on the theory of poetry. This means "not the language of poetry but the thing itself, wherever it may be found" (L 377); an essence of the imagination unpolluted by the history or even the brute matter of the subject. Poetry, so conceived, is like Arnold's secular religion, a replacement for God. The task of the scholar would be to elevate poetry to the status enjoyed by philosophy, giving it "the prestige that it would have if seen in proper perspective" (L 378). The man of "dynamic mind" whom Stevens suggests for this task is George Santayana, the New England poet/philosopher (though also, significantly, a European) with whom Stevens was later to identify so strongly, though here he suggests that Santayana is too philosophic.[1]

The "chair" thus became something like a throne: the focus for the aggrandizement of a poet, and for all Stevens' idealism one senses behind his suggestions a desire to establish the respectability and centrality of poetry in the life of the nation. It is not accidental that in the same period Stevens began to take on, tentatively, a public role -- he read at Princeton in 1942, and participated in the 1943 "Entretiens de Pontigny" conference at Mount Holyoke.[2] Through such acts the theorist,

1. A great deal has been written on Santayana's influence on Stevens. See in particular Louis Hughson, Thresholds of Reality: George Santayana and Modernist Poetics (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977).
2. For an account of the problems that this attempted engagement involved, see Peter Brazeau, "Wallace Stevens on the Podium: The Poet as Public Man," WSJ, 1 (1977), 120-27; and ch. 4 of Brazeau's Parts of A World: Wallace Stevens Remembered. An Oral Biography (New York: Random House, 1983).

the public poet, attempts to heal the wounds between his inner life and the larger world of culture. As Stevens wrote to Jean Wahl in 1943, "Poetry as a discipline" and "the philosophy of poetry" become the same thing (L 481).

I do not mean to suggest that Stevens confined his discussion of such topics to his prose -- far from it. We can see a similar preoccupation with a more public form of theory in contemporary poems like "Extracts from Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas" and "Esthétique du Mal," and in the "Notes." But the addresses represent important (and public) foci for Stevens' thought. As he later wrote, "I do like to do these papers because they clear my mind and make it necessary to take a good look at ideas that otherwise would drift about, vaguely, with no place to go."[1] They provide direction and structure.

Stevens' burst of activity in the period 1942-43 -- his mid-sixties -- seems to have been followed by a period of retrenchment. The war was obviously a part of this and, as Thomas Berger has argued, one can see an attempt to create a poetry which "saves" what can be saved of culture in Stevens' poetry of the period.[2] The notion of a public poetry seems to have become more difficult: there is, for example, the "major man" of "Paisant Chronicle," who is "beyond / Reality, composed thereof" (CP 335). "Major man" is fictive, but not "abstract" -- a fine but important distinction. At the same time, the value of "major man" as a national (as opposed to individual) focus is dismissed: "the most solemn burial / Is a paisant chronicle" -- a pronouncement which seems to explain Stevens' difficulty in accepting the ceremonial reinternment of Yeats in

1. Letter to Barbera Church, 22 April 1951. Quoted by Brazeau Parts of a World, p. 162.
2. Berger, pp. 3-80. The biographical details of this period, and the "winter" which Stevens seems to have entered around 1947, are difficult to interpret: there are few letters for 1947 in Letters, for example.

1948. The poet, Stevens argues of Yeats, can only justify such recognition in an oblique way. "The poet is individual, the politician is general," as he wrote in 1946 (L 526).

In the post-war period, Stevens commonly expressed a number of dissatisfactions with life -- with the New Deal, for example, with his own feelings of tiredness, and with modern art. One can see in poems like "Credences of Summer" (1946) and "The Auroras of Autumn" (1947) an attempt to chronicle the cycle of his feelings.[1] But in 1948 he made a return to the public arena, writing to William Van O'Connor "There is nothing that I desire more intently than to make a contribution to the theory of poetry" (L 585). The major essays of 1948, "Effects of Analogy" and "Imagination as Value," develop a number of ideas which seem important in his late career. In the former essay he sees a man's life as an imaginative structure composed of all its elements, including the accommodation which he makes with reality. The idea of "homecoming" is also introduced in this essay. At the end of his life a man may, like Santayana, return to reality -- a theme which is mirrored in Stevens' remarks of the following year concerning a pure poetry of reality: "That is what I am trying to get at at the moment. Perhaps I am not young enough for it, or old enough . . ." (L 631). In the second essay, "Imagination as Value," the title itself speaks of a reconciliation of the commercial and the poetic (the yoking of the two in such a way occurs in a number of letters of this period), and Stevens attempts to again reconcile the public and private, considering "imaginative life as social form" in order to bridge the gap between "the years of imagination" and "our later economic and political years" (NA 141-46). The "problems of

1. One of the drawbacks of Berger's argument is he sees "Credences" as a poem of "healing" (like "An Ordinary Evening") -- while it comes between the two major poems which he sees as "apocalyptic," "Esthétique du Mal" and "The Auroras."

the normal" are the true subject of the imagination, and Stevens excludes both "pure" art and narrowly philistine conceptions of the normal. The two halves of his life are thus hammered into unity.

The revitalization which these essays offered seems partly to account for the wider perspectives of the grand poem of the following year, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," with its "larger poem for a larger audience" and "great bosom, beard and being, alive with age" (CP 465-66). Stevens was beginning (as I will show) to think more actively about old age and the limits of existence as well as about the new beginnings that were required in order to keep writing. The peculiar symmetry between the theory and his poetry is suggested by a remark from "Imagination as Value" which could serve as the motto of all these late essays: "One turns to first works of the imagination with the same expectation with which one turns to last works of the reason" (NA 153). Last works of the reason are poems, or motives for poems.

Perhaps this is why Stevens continued to make apocalyptic pronouncements to his friends in his letters, even as he wrote on. He needed the fury which he said modern literature inspired in him (L 621, 624). The "passion of thinking" (L 513) is a result of frustration. There was a deep-seated need for self-limitation in Stevens, as I have already suggested, and it is in a comment of 1950 that he comes closest to recognizing it. He writes to Mrs. Church his usual complaint about frustrated poetic ambition: "where should I ever find a figure of speech adequate to size up the little that I have done compared to that which I once hoped to do. . . . I have not even begun to touch the spheres within spheres that might have been possible if, instead of devoting the principal amount of time to making a living, I had devoted it to thought

and poetry" (L 669). He adds, however, "But, then, if I had been more determined about it, I might now be looking back not with a mere sense of regret but at some actual devastation. . . . This is very much better than to have had all the time in the world and have found oneself inadequate." It is better not to have been tested.

In 1951, Stevens seems to have written little poetry. His letters of that year refer to no poetic activity of significance, and the bibliography shows that -- so far as it is possible to tell -- he composed at most a few minor poems: perhaps some of the group of eight poems he submitted to the Hudson Review in March 1952, "A Quiet Normal Life," and "Madam La Fleurie."[1] This relative pause can perhaps be traced to a specific point in a letter written in December 1950, in which he remarks of his "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" that he had planned a longer poem but got no further than the equation God = The Imagination and did not feel like developing it: "The implications of this statement were to follow, and may still" (L 701). The "Final Soliloquy" is in many ways a good closural poem (Joseph Riddel calls it the "ultimate discovery of [Stevens'] aesthetic"[2]), referring to the image of a candle as the imagination's flame which Stevens had used elsewhere, and presenting in the most heightened form the solipsism of the imagination. Stevens' major poems of 1949-50 (including "The Rock" and the "Final Soliloquy" itself) had all been in the sublime mode, but it seems significant that there is a strain about them, an intensity of desire which is expressed in the distance between the beginning and end of "The Rock." Even more revealing in this respect are the short poems which seem to have been written early in 1950. Stevens did not include

1. See the discussion of dating in Appendix I.
2. Joseph Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye: The Poetry and Poetics of Wallace Stevens (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 248.

"Nuns Painting Water-Lilies," "Americana," "The Course of a Particular" and a number of other poems of this period in the Collected Poems, and even if this is because he simply forgot to in some cases, they often display an anxiety or a sense of equivocation. But if we move over 1951 to the poems written after the interval of 1951, they are somewhat different: more measured, assured, more meditative. This is not only true for the great centre-pieces -- "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and "The World as Meditation" -- but also for lesser poems like "A Quiet Normal Life." How then is this difference to be explained?

The answer lies at least in part in what Stevens did do in 1951, which was to write four major pieces of prose. This, even more than 1948, was the year of Stevens the theorist. In December 1950, he suggested that he was going back to school, in a remark that elsewhere would seem entirely atypical: "One must have read all the books before one begins to think" (L 704). In the next year he produced "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," "Two or Three Ideas," the most confident of his "Honors and Acts" speeches, and, most important, "A Collect of Philosophy." The significance of these works is again partly that they see Stevens occupying the public stage, reading his addresses or (in the case of the "Collect") seeking to have his papers published. But it also lies in their subject matter, and the idea of literary theory which unites the public and private role of the writer.

In his 1946 poem "A Pastoral Nun" Stevens had described the end of the life of an old and idealized figure in these terms:

> Finally, in the last year of her age,
> Having attained a present blessedness,
> She said poetry and apotheosis are one. (CP 378-79)

Near death the nun (or poet) approaches a legendary existence. Two

"illustrations" of this point are offered. One is that if one lives "according to this law" then everything becomes poetry -- a programme which one could see as fundamental to "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." The tensions between art and life relax. In the second "illustration," poetry and apotheosis resemble each other in that "Each matters only in that which it conceives" -- they exist "in" realities which are reified.

In the 1951 essays both these ideas are developed, beyond the point of blockage which, I suggested, can be seen in the formula "God and the imagination are one." In "A Collect of Philosophy," Stevens refines his thinking about the priority of poetry. As the drafts of the essay show, one of the themes of the essay -- that the imagination grows tired and renews itself -- was manifested in its composition, as Stevens abandoned two rather anodyne endings in favour of the illustrating example of Planck, the physicist who became, at the end of his thesis on causality, a poet.[1] In the body of the essay the example is Socrates: "We observe that the confidence in the immortality of what was really Socrates was no less a confidence in the world" (OP 200). Apotheosis is an easing of the philosopher into poetry; his desire for certainty is abandoned in favour of a "willingness to believe beyond belief" (OP 202). On the other hand, the poet, "once he has achieved the integration for which he has been probing," becomes a philosopher (OP 197). His conceptions become a reality, at the point of another apotheosis: "The poet's native sphere . . . is what he can make of the world" (OP 198).

It is important to notice the way in which these conclusions unite the world of literature and that of ordinary life (including, implicitly, work). The concern for the relationship between poet and audience which

1. See Peter A. Brazeau, "'A Collect of Philosophy': The Difficulty of Finding What Would Suffice," and Wallace Stevens, "Three Manuscript Endings for 'A Collect of Philosophy,'" in A Celebration, pp. 46-49, 50-56.

is visible still in the 1948 essays is relaxed, and the focus is on the "abodes of the imagination" which men create for themselves (OP 204). It is possible to illustrate this shift more simply, I think, by examining the addresses which Stevens wrote for the various book award ceremonies which he attended in the period 1948-55. In "Imagination as Value" he had announced that "it is not my purpose to discuss the imagination as an institution" (NA 145), but it was something like that which he attempted in the "Honors and Acts" addresses, often using the occasion itself as an example of the connection between the imagination and society, or the national and spiritual economies. In the first of them (Bard College, 1948), he writes that "the act of conferring an honor on a poet is a poetic act" (OP 238) -- though poetry is, he adds, "something unreal." The same uncertainty is visible in his comments on Yeats's burial. Stevens implies that Yeats's readership did not warrant a national celebration, but nevertheless asserts that "the fact remains that his fame could not be different from his poetry" (L 617-18). The occasion is self-justifying, yet also a curiously empty celebration of a poet's "fame."

There is also in this essay a considerable play upon economic metaphors of various kinds. Stevens speaks of "the national economy as a poetico-economy" and of "thinking of the life of the rich" (and of the poor) as "a poetic act" (OP 240). Similarly, in a letter of 1946 he compares the life of the artist to that of "a speculator in Wall Street" (L 525). Such figures suggest the way in which he seeks to yoke together the two worlds of the artist and the New York in which "The struggle for existence was too revealed . . ." (L 542). He became involved himself in some of the struggles within the national poetico-economy, sitting on

prize-giving committees and recommending poets like Eberhart for grants. But this engagement of poetry and business can only be achieved at the risk that poetry value will be compromised, and there is in this period an occasional disgust at the "business" of poetry: the "contemporary conspiracy" of taste, the fact that "in literature goodness is finished" (L 592, 599).

In the second of the "Honors and Acts" essays (1951), Stevens moves away from any reconciliation with the "social form" of the writer. What ensures that poetry is "a vital engagement between man and his environment" and "a measure by which to achieve balance and measure" is the criterion of "love" or "faithfulness" to the muse, a quality inaccessable to the reader, "an inner companion to the conscience" (OP 242-43). Poetry is not a public performance, it

> makes itself manifest in a kind of speech that comes from secrecy. Its position is always an inner position, never certain, never fixed. It is to be found beneath the poet's word and deep within the reader's eye in those chambers in which the genius of poetry sits alone with her candle in a moving solitude. (OP 243)

This fine rhapsody is directly in the tradition, described recently by David Simpson, of Romantic and post-Romantic polemic against the fetishization of reading.[1] It is the word within the word which is valuable, not the outward show. In the last of the addresses, that for the National Book Award for 1955, the emphasis is again on the "mighty burden of poetry" whose significance is "second to none" (OP 245). What he values is not his actual production, the pages of his books, but "the uncollected poems which I have not had the strength to realize" (OP 246), another hymn to potentiality rather than product (though he ends the address by praising Knopf for the fine job they made of the Collected

1. David Simpson, Fetishism and Imagination: Dickens, Melville, Conrad (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). I am indebted to this work also for my use of the term "fetishism" in discussing Stevens' attitude to "the book" later in this chapter.

Poems). The place of business also features in this address, but as it is transformed by metaphor and poetry (rather than itself being imposed on poetry, as it was in 1948). The "cavern" in which the poet meditates may be "a law office or a place of business" (OP 245), but poetry is not therefore itself business. And though the award of honors may bring the poet "back to reality" (OP 246) and remind him of the larger world, this is not an identity of the poet and society, but rather homage: "He accepts them as tokens of the community that exists between poetry on the one hand and men and women on the other." The awards, not the poems, are a coinage, a tenuous link at best between poet and establishment; and as he commented in a letter, "the real satisfaction is poetry itself" (L 868). The final criteria are thus inward. The unification of economic and poetic languages which he had attempted in the 1940s results in poetry's becoming the dominant source of value.

The process which I have described in these essays parallels, I suspect, the easing of tensions in Stevens' life. In his letters of the 1950s, there is no longer the same divide between his "two careers," the office had become the office of a poet (who was still, of course, an executive). And the poet, partly through his essays and addresses, had to some extent become the scholar, the figure who receives a final refinement in the "all-round man" of Stevens' 1954 essay "The Whole Man: Perspectives, Horizons." To become a "scholar" is reach one of those points of professional identification of which Stevens had always been wary (despite the Adagia note, "Poetry is the scholar's art" [CP 169]). Writing to his friend Peter Lee in 1954, he remarked that a letter from Lee had reminded him how much "a young Korean scholar, and a somewhat old American student who had never had time to become a scholar resemble each

other" (L 845). The self-defensive screen of a long studentship is removed.

Perhaps for this reason, Stevens grew increasingly realistic about his own tendency to distance the world of art (Europe, Paris, exotic friends) in his later years. In 1952 he described Tom McGreevy (whom he has not yet met) as "mythical, theoretical, an inhabitant of the world of names" (L 738). Fourteen months earlier he had written to Mme. Vidal in Paris that the excitement of receiving catalogues was "more real at this distance than it might actually be" (L 698), and in 1953 he expanded on this theme, describing his Paris as "a Paris that has never existed," a product of desire (L 773). To recognise this is to see life whole in a way which Stevens had not often done in earlier life, and perhaps to admit that the refuge is identical with his daily routine. That is the implication of a letter of 1953, which in its "weatherlessness" is reminiscent of his late poem "A Clear Day and No Memories":

> How fortunate I am, in such weather, to have the office, whereone lives in a sort of vacuum, containing nothing but the pastime of work. The great building is like a neutral zone, invulnerable to the weather. The leaves outdoors seen through the windows, belong to a perishable landscape, come from nowhere. (L 776)

This is part of a deliberate and mannered evocation of his milieu for Mrs. Church, but it echoes a number of other letters in which he calls the office "this solid rock under my feet" (L 767), and praises routine. He continued to complain occasionally about being in a rut (eg. L 799, 827), but this no longer brings a counteracting longing for freedom, Paris, a world of art. It is, I think, this self-acceptance which produces the return to the poetry of "earth" or "being" which Woodward, Hines and others see in the poems of Stevens' extreme old age. It is not, however, a return to reality in the sense that many writers envisage

it. Stevens gave up his attempts to redeem or to fight reality in this period, and the world of work became less of an "anchorage" and more of a poetic universe in which the old man as the theorist of poetry, the "whole man," meditates inwardly.

Stevens' last few years were characterized by an acceptance of his standing as a poet, but also by a tendency for the poet to turn inward to that world of everyday experience which he described to Mrs. Church, and often, to minimize his own achievements. In 1952 he wrote that he did not wish to produce that "long poem" which "at my age a poet starts to write chiefly because he persuades himself that it is necessary to have a long poem among his works" (L 755). His own Selected Poems seemed "slight and small" (L 760), and he was well aware that his actual powers of production were weakened by age. He withdrew from the public arena, giving no more readings, and spoke disparagingly of the "public mythology" surrounding writers like Henry Miller (L 768). He suggested that Marianne Moore had over-written, and avoided doing so himself. In a letter to Robert Pack he denied that his work could be easily interpreted. Its meaning is peculiarly his, finally completed only in an unwritten addition:

> That a man's work should remain indefinite is often intentional. For instance, in projecting a supreme fiction, I cannot imagine anything more fatal than to state it definitely and incautiously. For a long time, I have thought of adding other sections to the NOTES and one in particular: It Must Be Human. But I think it would be wrong not to leave well enough alone. (L 863-64)

When he finally acquiesced to the Collected Poems in April 1954, he described it to Mrs. Church as "good housekeeping" (L 832), and there is a note of resignation in his letters to his publishers making the arrangements. Their publication brought him pleasure, but increasingly

in terms of what it had meant for him: "as if one had fulfilled one's self and, in a general sort of way, done something important -- important to one's self" (L 842). Ironically, when he was offered the Charles Eliot Norton chair at Harvard -- a poetry chair at last -- he was unwilling to leave the bed-rock of his office, the student's lair. But in November 1954 he was writing the few remaining poems of that bed-rock, and had only ten months to live -- about the term of the professorship.

4.1.2 The Theory of Old Age

Like most poets, Stevens included portraits of old age in his early work. In Harmonium in its 1923 version there are conventional figures for old age, like the sage of "Six Significant Landscapes," and the "High-Toned Old Christian Woman" who serves as a foil for the young poet: the common picture of age, that is, as ideal wisdom or rigid emptiness. The only poem in which old age could be said to have a "metaphysic" is "From the Misery of Don Joost," in which the mutability celebrated in "Sunday Morning" is placed within the context of the "powerful seasons" of a life. But Stevens' more mature depiction of age can be seen as beginning with a poem from the second edition of Harmonium, "Anatomy of Monotony" -- one of a group of poems presaging the awakening of his powers in the 1930s. The Wordsworthian alliance of nature and creativity is presented in inverted form: since we age, then nature must follow. The body is "deceived" by summer, and lives to see "a barer sky that does not bend" (CP 107). Here as elsewhere, aging is connected with Stevens' seasonal cycle. Implicitly, we grow towards a perpetual winter which is the bed-rock of existence. In its barreness, "Anatomy of Monotony" anticipates the Stevens of the late 1940s.

But Stevens, while he alludes to this wintriness here and in other poems of the 1930s ("Mozart, 1935," for example) is not willing to accept it. The voice that is great within us rises up, and the poet turns -- as in "A Fading of the Sun" -- back to the powers of nature:

> The warm antiquity of self,
> Everybody, grows suddenly cold.
> The tea is bad, bread sad.
> How can the world so old be so mad
> That the people die?
> . . . . . .
> Within as pillars of the sun,
> Supports of night. The tea,
> The wine is good. The bread,
> The meat is sweet.
> And they will not die. (CP 139)

The same theme of bad bread is taken up in the slightly later "Dry Loaf," with its "dry men" reminiscent of Eliot, but here the desiccation is local -- it is one of a number of pessimistic poems of this period. In one of them, "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts" (CP 209), there is the suggestion of a crisis of identification with the world. The "self that touches all edges" and expands into the grass, even the "four corners of night," is humped up into the fixity of "a carving in space"; it becomes a stone. This is a definition of over-ripeness, almost of the narcissism described in poems like "Cuisine Bourgeoise" and "Jumbo." But in the opening poem of Stevens' next volume, Transport to Summer, a similar humped head speaks in a version of the Orphic myth. In "God is Good. It is a Beautiful Night":

> the head is speaking. It reads the book.
> It becomes the scholar again, seeking celestial
> Rendezvous. . . . (CP 285)

As Dianne Middlebrook has remarked, Stevens often uses reading or study as a figure for points where he revitalizes his career.[1] Here he addresses his "brown bird" and moon: "The song of the great space of your age pierces / The fresh night." Old age is an afflatus, a fresh

1. Middlebrook, p. 211.

beginning; and, interestingly in terms of the dialectic which I sketched in the previous section, the attribute of the scholar. "God is Good" was written in 1941; Stevens was sixty-two.

Some four years later, in "Credences of Summer" itself, the scholar as an old man is metamorphized into the "old man standing on the tower, / Who reads no book" (CP 374). He is full of awareness, but fulfilment here is closer to stasis, "a feeling capable of nothing more," than it is to the state of ideal meditation which is often ascribed to this figure. The old man is persistently described in terms of a limit, and a final rhetoric which looks forward to Stevens' very last poem, here a "Pure rhetoric of a language without words." The fullness of old age is thus so complete, so self-contained and internalized, that it dispenses with communication; it prefigures his final silence and vanishing into his work. In many poems, as in this one, such a characterization sets up a dialectical movement towards such totalities, and then (necessarily) away from them. "Credences of Summer" is full of such relationships: the day versus the year, the individual the race, and finally the meditating (and old) author verses his characters in their "youthful happiness" (CP 378). Old age is thus a state of realization which exists dialectically.

"Credences of Summer" can only be discussed properly in the contexts of Stevens' seasonal dynamics, and I will shortly consider how they interact with a rather less ideal use of age in the late 1940s. But I will first explore more fully this figure of an old man in what could be called his ideal aspect, meditating within himself. The old man of "Credences of Summer" has parallels in other old men, particularly the rabbis of "Things of August" (1949) and other poems, who are typically

described as being like embodied texts -- they have, that is, adequately recorded their impression of the world, and are sages.[1] But the rabbi of "Things of August" is also human. The poem, as I will show, traces a movement from the tower of "Credences of Summer" to a state in which the protagonist dwells among "local objects," close to death. In this, he precisely parallels the old man whom Stevens describes in his 1948 essay "Effects of Analogy" as returning to his village at the end of his life and finding that "reality is enough" (NA 129). As Frank Kermode has suggested, the poet's "homecoming" is a theme which is developed in a number of late poems and essays.[2] "Reality is the Activity of the Most August Imagination" is the final such poem, describing a drive home to New Haven after an award ceremony. Stevens' sense of "homecoming" can also, I think, be related to his abandonment of his more determined attempts to link poetry and the world in the early 1940s. The same word "villages" (which he used in "Effects of Analogy") is picked up in a letter of 1948, expressing his reservations about the literary world: "One is good only in villages. Every man of sense knows that in literature goodness is finished" (L 592).

Instead, he moves in the other direction in reconciling his two careers. He remarks of the old man in "Effects of Analogy" that "he too dwells in an analogy" (NA 129). His life is a mythic pattern. In another essay of 1948, Stevens singles out one old man who has "a life in which the function of the imagination has a function similar to its function in any deliberate work of art or letters" (NA 147-48). He exists in a metaphor, as the syntax suggests -- in a function inside a

1. Joseph Carroll suggests that the old figures in Stevens early and late poetry are influenced by Tennyson's poem "The Ancient Sage" -- which, he argues, represents Tennyson at his most visionary. See "The Ancient and Modern Sage: Tennyson and Stevens," VP, 22 (1984), 1-14.
2. Kermode, "Dwelling Poetically."

function. This old man is, of course, George Santayana, who Stevens knew was living in a convent in Rome.[1] Most lives exist in a compromise with necessity; a few exist "by the deliberate choice of those who live them" (NA 147). Stevens extends his earlier use of Santayana, from the public reconciling of life and art to an existence inside art.

Santayana was not the only role-model for Stevens in this period. He questioned Mrs. Church on Rene Auberjonois in 1948: "The figure of Auberjonois absorbs me: the old and self-willed and, I suppose, stern artist who lives only to theorize and to discipline himself" (L 607), following this up with a series of questions on whether it was the "'appauvrisement' of the theorist grown abstract with age," or "the abundance . . . of Giorgione." Of these two possibilities (which Stevens also invokes in his late essay on Valéry) it was the first which appealed to Stevens, and which he associated with Santayana. The emphasis on discipline was probably reinforced by a letter of Santayana's shown to him by Rodriguez Feo in 1949. He wrote to his friend:

> Your devotion to this superb figure delights me. How strong his handwriting is and how the letter convinces one that there is nothing mixes with long life like a strong mind. I love his remark: "I have always, somewhat sadly, bowed to expediency or fate." (L 635)

He mentioned the same remark to another correspondent a few weeks later, saying that he had been meditating on it, and adding that "Santayana is not a philosopher in any austere sense" (L 637). He seems, in fact, to have felt even closer to Santayana as a result. Santayana's life had its compromises, like his own, and it was only in Rome that he had come home at last. Curiously, the same theme of "homecoming" is visible in the

1. Stevens probably read about Santayana in an article by Edmund Wilson in The New Yorker, 6 April 1946, entitled "A Reporter at Large: Santayana at the Convent of the Blue Nuns." For a discussion of its influence on Stevens, see Litz, Introspective Voyager, pp. 275-82; and my discussion of it in "An Old Philosopher in Rome."

letter in which, in 1952, Stevens reported Santayana's death, some months after writing his "pre-elegy":

> If you go to New York when you are young, you find endless young people; if you go there when you are sort of old and sort of lame and sort of stiff, the place is crawling with cripples and one comes home to hold one's head up again and to feel young once more. I grieve to hear of the death of George Santayana in Rome. Fifty years ago, I knew him well, in Cambridge, where he often asked me to come to see him. That was before he had definitely decided not to be a poet. (L 761).

He goes on to discuss Santayana's becoming a full-time philosopher, implying that his own situation is similar:

> The reason (like the law, which is only a form of the reason) is a jealous mistress. He seems to have gone to live at the convent, in which he died, in his sixties, probably gave them all he had and asked them to keep him, body and soul. (L 761-2)

Both passages are interesting. The sudden lurch from a discussion of Stevens' own life cycle and return "home," the young/old Stevens and the young/old Santayana, involves a parallelism in which the pattern of Santayana's life becomes comparable to his own, as the subsequent passage suggests. The details which Stevens invents stretch Santayana's period at the convent and emphasize his monasticism. He stresses that bowing to fate which had so impressed him in Rodriguez Feo's letter. Santayana resigns all outward cares and returns to a state of pure being. Just such a state is described in a letter written early in the next year:

> the habitual, customary, has become, at my age, such a pleasure in itself that it is coming to be that pleasure is at least as great as any. It is a large part of the normality of the normal. And I suppose, that projecting this idea to its ultimate extension, the time will arrive when just to <u>be</u> will take in everything without the least <u>doing</u> since even the least doing is irrelevant to pure being. (L 767)

Stevens seems to have seen such a withdrawn and patterned existence as being part of the ideal life-cycle of the poet/philosopher. Santayana as he is described in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" is the great

reconciler, "living in two worlds" but meditating in a half-sleep which anticipates all those other poems of Stevens' last four years in which he sees himself as an old man on the borders of sleep, and the borders of a "final form" (CP 508-11). The ideal provided by Santayana thus allows Stevens to imagine the shape of his own end, just as he had, in the essays of 1951, become the "scholar" whom he had imagined.

One version of old age -- the theoretical version, one could say -- is thus, for Stevens, constructed within this myth of a rather idealized figure, whose most important attribute is an inwardness which is set against the rough and tumble of the world. His depiction of the old poet as a rabbi results in a heightened dualism in terms of the poet and the world: the old man dwells, almost, in art. But there is also, I think, a duality in Stevens' perception of old age. There is a second version of old age in the late Stevens, in which it is part of a recurrent crisis. One source is his aging: his letters around 1950 often complain of a loss of energy to read and write. But a sense of lateness in Stevens' career is often used for more conscious thematic purposes -- particularly to open poems. We can see this in the excursus into old age in section XVI of "A Ordinary Evening in New Haven," with its "total leaflessness":[1]

> the wind whimpers oddly of old agee
> In the western night. The venerable mask,
>
> In this perfection, occasionally speaks
> And something of death's poverty is heard.
> This should be tragedy's most moving face. (CP 477)

1. This is, of course, the phrase which Vendler uses as her chapter-heading for the section on Stevens' late work in On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens' Longer Poems (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969). Vendler argues that this poem's burden is "that his old age had given him a rare subject, rarely written about and so not among the images of time. . . . He could not say, with Yeats, that he never had a more excited, fantastic imagination; age had exhausted him soul and body" (p. 272). My disagreement with this pessimistic view will be apparent, though it is true that Stevens was willing to describe old age in this way at times.

"An Ordinary Evening" soon goes on to abandon this mood: "As if life and death were ever physical." But we can see the same material resurfacing in later poems. "Things of August" opens with "an old and disused ambit of the soul"; "A Discovery of Thought" and "The Course of a Particular" both return to "the antipodes of poetry, dark winter" (OP 95), as does "A Quiet Normal Life," "The Rock" itself opens with the strongest possible expression of pessisism: "It is an illusion that we were ever alive . . ." (CP 525). The list can be extended, including the openings of "Two Illustrations That the World is What You Make of It," and "Lebensweisheitspielerei":

> The sky seemed so small that winter day,
> A dirty light on a lifeless world,
> Contracted like a withered stick. (CP 513)

> Weaker and weaker, the sunlight falls
> In the afternoon. The proud and strong
> Have departed. (CP 504)

As the second of these two quotations suggests, poetry itself seems old. Stevens' letters in the early 1950s often claim that his own work (as well as other literature) is wearisome. There is the danger of being typecast, which he discussed after reading books on himself in this period. Poetry no longer renovates experience. In April 1950 he wrote "At my ripe age the world begins to seem too thin," adding "Perhaps the idea of more is merely another illusion" (L 677). He found that spring depressing (rather than stimulating, as the season usually was), and looking over his work for the new editions that Knopf were preparing, he commented "Poetry is like the imagination itself. It is not likely to be satisfied with the same thing twice" (L 678, 680). His own work had become like reality, itself in need of renovation. Old age becomes, in this guise, a metaphor for the tiredness of literature. Of course, as such it exists within a cycle of weariness and recovery. Not only do

individual poems like "The Rock" move from weariness to affirmation, but there seems to have been a similar cycle in Stevens' life -- "The Rock" was itself part of a new influx in July 1950. Where the old man was an image for fixity and completion (though also for the refreshment offered by "villages"), the weariness of old age exists within the seasons of a life.

Stevens' seasonal dynamics are, of course, an important part of his description of the process of aging. In order to introduce this subject, I will consider what seems to me to be a pivotal poem of Stevens' late career, one in which his characterization of old age can clearly be seen. "Things of August" (1949) is a difficult poem, not easy to reconcile with a transcendentalist view of the late Stevens (Bloom calls it "not wholly successful," and many studies ignore it).[1] It opens in autumn, in an "old and disused ambit of the soul," in which the poet declares that the song of the locusts can only take on a "new aspect" if there is an elevation of meaning in which it makes sense to speak of "the spirit's sex," or voices meeting naked, or "answers to attitudes" (CP 489) -- a thinking in metaphors which is characteristic of the late poems. In the second stanza what could be called the "situation" behind this dialogue of oldness and transfiguration is made more explicit. The poet/mariner is trapped within a shell (also the dome of the heavens) and Whitman-like, Stevens urges him to

> Spread outward. Crack the round dome. Break
> through.
> Have liberty not as the air within a grave
> Or down a well. Breath freedom, oh, my native
> In the space of horizons that neither love nor hate. (CP 490)

Breath displaces the hardened (and in the context of Stanza I, autumnal) world in which the poet may well be dead; he resists petrification. The metaphor of the voyage recalls earlier poems, as well as Tennyson's

1. Bloom, Wallace Stevens, p. 253.

Ulysses, an old man seeking new horizons who is a potent presence in a number of Stevens' late poems.

If the poem's first two sections set the scene for a discussion of old age, then the third introduces a distinction which structures the next five sections. "High poetry and low" represent the extremes of "Experience in perihelion" -- the poetry of "Credences of Summer," which represents "The peace of the last intelligence," and thus a limit, and an experience in "penumbra," the shadow of death. Again, there are two possibilities for old age. The difference, he suggests, is that the later experience is "the same thing without desire." This is a difficult phrase, linked with a return to the earth: "a world of objects, / Which, being green and blue, appease him, / By chance, or happy chance, or happiness . . ." (CP 491). Insight is relinquished ("mistaken" is Stevens' word) in favour of a less elevated awareness. There is perhaps the hint of a quarrel with the late Yeats in the terms in which that descent is described:

> He turned from the tower to the house,
> From the spun sky and the high and deadly view. . . .
> . . . . . .
> It was curious to have to descend
> And, seated in the nature of his chair,
> To feel the satisfactions
> Of that transparent air. (CP 493)

To accept this requires, in the intervening passages, a self-deflation. Sections IV and VI (the former in a troubled fashion) are devoted to proving the priority of the natural world: "The world imagines for the beholder." His muse ("The woman") "is chosen but not by him, / Among the endlessly emerging accords." Inspiration is linked to nature by an analogy, as the latter half of section VI makes clear:

> The world? The inhuman as human? That which
> thinks not,
> Feels not, resembling thought, resembling feeling?

It habituates him to the invisible,
By its faculty of the exceptional,

The faculty of ellipses and deviations,
In which he exists but never as himself. (CP 493)

The natural world, that is, is both a mirror of the poet's self-estrangement, and a potentially reviving force able to provide fresh turns of metaphor and being, "deviations." Having thus emphasized contingency and incompletion, Stevens then turns (in section VIII) to ask how "the particles became / The whole man," and answers that it is in the figure, an "impersonal person," who can be seen both as the apotheosis of tradition (though not the tradition-as-limitation of the poem's opening) and as the individual poet at the point at which he vanishes into an "archaic space." He represents an ideal integration.

The poem's ninth section moves abruptly from this figure to "A new text of the world." In section V Stevens had described "The thinker as reader" who "wears the words he reads to look upon / Within his being"; who wears, like a number of other figures in the late poems, his own text as a garment. In section IX this text is made public and disseminated, and celebrated as "A text of intelligent men / At the centre of the unintelligible." The struggles of poetry end in such an ideal; though "Things of August" returns, in its final section, to "poverty" and "an air of lateness" in which Stevens' muse is "exhausted and a little old." The poem as a whole is difficult, but the debate within it on old age is clear enough. Aging represents, on the other hand, stasis and exhaustion, as well as the tyranny of the Yeatsian and oracular "spun sky" and tower. On the other hand, it can be associated with a humanized central text and the figure of the "bearded peer."[1] The path between

1. Producing a similar distinction between types of old men, Joseph Kronick attempts to distinguish two types of reader in Stevens, the rabbi and the priest. The former is, he argues, the "secular reader" who accepts the secondary nature of all language. See Joseph G. Kronick, "Of Parents, Children, and Rabbis: Wallace Stevens and the Question of the Book," Boundary 2, 10, No. 3 (1982), 125-54.

two possibilities is effected through a number of shifts: a descent from the heights, an alliance of the poet and the natural world in which its powers and mutability are seen as reflected in language, and a portrayal of the realized poet as a "new text of the world." It ends with a sense of sufficiency gained even at the "edge of night," but also with the need for a final effort. Death, the "rex Impolitor," is "not yet here" in the final stanza, and the muse has "given too much, but not enough" -- formulae which themselves suggest a balance of tiredness and the need for further achievement which can be seen as the predicament of old age.

I have dealt with "Things of August" as an example of Stevens' late period in part because it is short and concentrated, in part because it is often neglected by those who see a greater transcendentalism in his work. Some of the same conclusions can be drawn from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." With what could almost be a motto for old age, "Desire prolongs its adventure to create / Forms of farewell, furtive among green ferns" (CP 482), "An Ordinary Evening" ranges from extreme weariness and an evocation of a decay and rigidity to a new clearness: "the sense / Of cold and earliness is a daily sense, / Not the predicate of bright origin" (CP 481). The seasonal cycle is carried within the poet, and thus guarantees his continued motion.[1]

Winter is traditionally the season of old age, and there is, as a number of writers have suggested, a return to the thematics of winter in Stevens' poetry around 1948, in which we can see the poet dramatizing the cycle of his own existence (though there is some disagreement on the

1. Cf. Helen Vendler, who argues that "the old detach themselves from empathy" in Stevens' late poems; "empathy" including the cyclic progress of the seasons (Part of Nature, p. 45). In fact, the late Stevens identifies strongly with winter, partly because the season contains a sense of a buried potentiality to reawaken.

significance of the shift[1]). Irvin Ehrenpreis, rightly I think, sees a "new, wintry consciousness" in the 1948 "Page from a Tale."[2] The poem describes an Arctic landscape like that of section 33 of "Song of Myself," but opens with a pastiche of Yeats and Heine threaded into the verse -- an allusiveness which seems to indicate a literary weariness, or decadence.[3] The scene is dreamed by the protagonist, yet is real: "The sea was a sea he dreamed. / Yet Hans lay wide awake" (CP 422). As in "Things of August," this frozen state within which things seem to be entrapped is escaped by an appeal to natural powers: the men on the ice are afraid of the sun, but in the second half of the poem the mind's powers are linked to the sun's, melting the ice, as metaphor is piled on metaphor. Discontinuity, thought "beyond the habit of sense," is produced by the melting of the ice within which we could see the quotations from Yeats and Heine suspended, and the result is new poetry: "whatever in water strove to speak / Broke dialect in a break of memory." The ice of winter is replaced by the "slight gestures which could rend the palpable ice," fresh movement in the mind.

"Page from a Tale" is a confusing and not particularly successful poem, but in a number of other poems of 1948 the same preoccupation with winter is detectable, and can be seen in a quick review of their central

1. The argument is perhaps best presented by Thomas Hines, who suggests that winter is the exposing of "Being" and "the source of creativity." He suggests that this period follows the period of imaginative need represented by "The Auroras of Autumn." Diane Middlebrook, more positively, sees autumn as a "post-creative period when in order to enter a new creative cycle the mind begins a process of detachment from its own creations." Hines, pp. 250-65, Middlebrook, pp. 203-11. See also Richard A. Macksey, "The Climates of Wallace Stevens," in The Act of the Mind: Essays on the Poetry of Wallace Stevens, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce and J. Hillis Miller (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 185-203; and Litz, Introspective Voyager, pp. 282-95.
2. Ehrenpreis, "Strange Relation: Stevens' Nonsense," in A Celebration, p. 233.
3. On the poem's sources, see E.I. Shoenberg, "Wallace Stevens' 'Page from a Tale': An Exploration of the Poem and Its Sources," WSJ, 6 (1982), 39-45.

images. In "Large Red Man Reading" the burly reader reads while his listeners shiver in the frost (CP 423-24). In "This Solitude of Cataracts" there is the desire for a "permanent realization" (CP 425) -- a wintry bedrock of experience; and in "In the Element of Antagonisms" the central man appears in his "wintry size" (CP 426). In the poem following this one, "In a Bad Time," there is the beggar who "gazes on calamity": "For him cold's glacial beauty is his fate" (CP 426). The way in which Stevens uses the imagery of snow in his late career confirms this seasonal shift. There is a period between 1940 and 1947 in which he seldom uses the images of snow which are common in his earlier work -- and then mainly to describe the hostile outer world, as in "Chocorua to its Neighbour" (CP 297, 301). With the climactic fears of section IV of "The Auroras of Autumn" there arrives, however, a more sombre poet who "in the midst of summer stops / To imagine winter" (CP 417). Subsequently, a snow-covered landscape is described in a number of poems, and such settings are common through to the end of Stevens' career.

One common explanation of Stevens' use of a winter thematics after 1948 has been that there is a return to "being" and an existence amidst what in 1948 he called "plain reality" (L 636). In "Imago," another poem of 1948, Stevens writes of "a glacier running through delirium, / Making this heavy rock a place, / Which is not of our lives composed" (CP 439) -- a glacier of "being" which is like the river Swatara in "Metaphor as Degeneration" (also 1948). But such "being" is not the product of an accommodation with reality; rather the opposite. It is described as including "death and the imagination" (CP 444), and lines like those quoted above from "Imago" suggest that the life of the mind is isolated from the world by winter, rather than joined to it. To use the title of

another poem of 1948, "The Ultimate Poem is Abstract." Abstraction and a heightened dualism of mind and world are more characteristic of winter, and if nature's powers are invoked they are -- as I will show -- introjected rather than being seen as external. The winter scene thus corresponds to the outside world within which the old man meditates.

But there is, I think, more to Stevens' winter mood than a poetic askesis. In these poems, snow is not the almost aggressive masculine coldness that it was in early poems like "Farewell to Florida." Rather it is a season which takes on some of the curious symmetries of the "last works of the reason / first works of the imagination" dichotomy. Snow is the "pre-history of February," or "a refreshment of cold air" (CP 522, OP 116). In poems like "On the Way to the Bus" a new understanding emerges quietly. There is more difficulty in "A Discovery of Thought": "the effort to be born / Surviving being born, the event of life" (OP 96). These images inevitably recall those late poems in which Stevens plays upon the theme of an old man dreaming and, often, a child of thought resulting; others include "Questions are Remarks," "The Sick Man," "A Child Asleep in Its Own Life," "An Old Man Asleep," "Prologues to What Is Possible," and (less clearly) "The Dove in Spring."[1] In such poems, the late season of winter contains a hidden potentiality for a new life, separated from it by the end of the cycle in death and rebirth. The "wakefulness inside sleep" (CP 522) which is characteristic of the old poet is akin to a gestation of "The life of the poem in the mind." The poet's consciousness is often described as a blank (like the snow) awaiting a new inscription, or the birth of a new text. In "Prologues to What Is Possible" there are the "enclosures of hypothesis / On which men

1. An anticipation of such scenes is section VII of "Notes," which begins with "a composing as the body tires," and ends with a moment "in which / We more than awaken, sit on the edge of sleep, / As on an elevation . . ." (CP 386).

speculated in summer when they were half asleep," which include the question "What self, for example, did he contain that had not yet been loosed [?]" There is always, that is, a further discovery, and here the dreams "in summer" are used to foretell a "puissant flick" which will bring "the whole vocabulary of the South" to the wintry north (CP 517). Sleep, in many of these poems, seems to act as a metaphor for the borders of death, but usually with the intimations of a continued existence in the life of the text. "The Rock" ends in "vivid sleep," and in "Artificial Populations" there is both the sound of "the wind as it deepens, and late sleep, / And music that last long and lives the more" (OP 113) -- the external world, and the enduring dream of the poet. In "A Discovery of Thought" this dialectic of lateness and earliness is at its most visible. "At the antipodes of poetry, dark winter . . . one is a child again." The "antipodal, far-fetched creature, worthy of birth" (OP 96) which Stevens imagines is that which prevents the old poet from freezing into stasis (it is no accident that one of this group of poems is about Stevens and his grandchild), it is "The accent of deviation in the living thing." But as such, it is carried within the dream of the old human, like the troubled howling of the "Dove in Spring," "too far / For daylight and too near for sleep" (OP 98). Elsewhere, as in "Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself," the "scrawny cry" which intrudes into the dream is reality itself, or "A new knowledge of reality" (CP 534).

Within this tangled cluster of images, one can see a pattern in which the old man's meditation within the winter landscape of late Stevens represents a fullness and an inwardness which, particularly as sleep, approaches the final stasis of death. But in many such poems,

there is a saving intrusion of reality -- "A perception of cold breath, more revealing than / A perception of sleep" in "On the Way to the Bus" (OP 116) -- in which the outside world acts as a portent of future revelation, like the trees swaying in the wind in "The Region November," which suggest "A revelation not yet intended" (OP 115). The outside world acts as a figure for the poet's lack of completion. In other versions of this story of sleepy old men, the mind itself predicts a new birth amidst the snow -- often borrowing from the powers of nature in doing so, as in "How Now, O, Brightener. . . . " with its "trouble of the mind" which is "a residue, a land, a rain, a warmth" (OP 97). The spring within the poet predicts rebirth, though whether in this context it is the birth of posthumous reputation Stevens refers to, or simply the birth of one more poem, it is difficult to tell. The thematics of winter thus, in combination with the figure of the old man, enable the poet to portray the state of being he enters in old age, an inwardness which can still borrow a metaphorical strength from "reality," and produce a final fecundity in a harsh season. The heightened dualism of old age, suggested by the division of Stevens' description of it into the wise old man on the one hand, and the weariness of things on the other, is overcome by the prospect of a palm at the end of the mind.

4.2 Topics of Stevens' Late Work

In the section which follows, two topics will be discussed which seem to receive a particular attention in Stevens' late poems and essays. Both are closely related to the idea of the end of a literary career, and to the way in which the poet sees his work and its future.

4.2.1 The Architecture of a Career

In his book The Dome and The Rock: Structure in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (1968) James Baird employs an architectural metaphor to describe Stevens' career as a "totality": "The full art of Stevens is organized with architectural precision. The shape of the mind becomes a building, the framework of which is founded in a willed symmetry of design."[1] This is to place Stevens in the tradition of writers who craft a career carefully, with an eye to the achieved product. Other critics have argued, however, that Stevens' mature work can be explained best as avoiding any such well-shaped totality. In fact, there is visible throughout Stevens' career a debate, often couched in architectural terms, on these opposed possibilities: on whether the "shape of the mind" is an achieved structure, or whether the aim of the artist is primarily to create an adequate discourse, a way of dealing with the world.[2] Near the end of his career, these questions come into sharper focus as the accumulations of a lifetime suggest an incipient "totality," a crystalized world-view. As I will show, Stevens' work becomes one of what he called the "abodes of the imagination" (OP 204), a house within which he lives and breathes.

In a famous exchange with William Carlos Williams early in his career, Stevens expressed his dislike for "miscellany" and suggested that it was what kept him from publishing a book. "A single manner or mood

1. James Baird, The Dome and the Rock: Structure in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. xxv-xxvi. An even more extreme example of this kind of thinking, drawing on the idea of organic form, is Richard A. Blessing's Wallace Stevens' "Whole Harmonium" (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1970).
2. It is possible, of course, to seek to reconcile these two views. Frank Kermode, in his Wallace Stevens (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p. 18, refers to the "monolith" of Stevens' late discourse: a metaphor suggesting both possibilities.

thoroughly matured and exploited" is to be preferred to pastiche or over-ambition.[1] But this did imply a certain ideal, however difficult to obtain: the ideal of a book as a matured realization. Stevens was subsequently persuaded to publish Harmonium, and the questions which he raised about Williams' book hover over his own work. How much was it a unified design, and how much a miscellany? What did it aim at, in its title and the one which he suggested earlier: "The Grand Poem: Preliminary Minutiae"? For the book seems to be planned -- it was ordered deliberately, for example, unlike most subsequent volumes -- but also to delight its own eccentricity and exuberance.[2]

In this context, it is interesting that Stevens dropped the poem "Architecture" (first published in 1918) from the later editions of Harmonium and the Collected Poems. In it he tackles the problems of the "architecture" of a career in a way which is perhaps too overt, from the opening question on:

> What manner of building shall we build?
> Let us design a chastel de chasteté.
> De pensée. . . .
> Never cease to deploy the structure. (OP 16)

The poem is constructed of a series of questions: "what manner of utterance shall there be?" "How shall we hew the sun, / Split it and make blocks, / To build a ruddy palace?" They are followed by the answer: the poet will build a baroque "building of light" with many chambers, towers, shafts, and a dome, and will set within it "guardians" to guard it from the philistines and the weak-spirited:

> Only the lusty and plenteous
> Shall walk
> The bronze-filled plazas
> And the nut-shell esplanades.

Perhaps Stevens thought the poem too programmatic ("Never cease to

1. Williams, "Kora in Hell," pp. 15-16.
2. See William W. Bevis, "The Arrangement of Harmonium," ELH, 37 (1970), 456-73.

deploy the structure" might almost be Pound). But it contains a number of images which anticipate the way in which he later describes the writer's oeuvre, including the structure of air which he invokes in the poem on Santayana, the "closes / Overlooking whole seasons" which are found within it; the sun and moon, the directional alignments of south, north, east, west, and even the "cock-tops" at the edges of the "edifice, / Which, like a gorgeous palm, / Shall tuft the commonplace" (an image which reminds one of Stevens' last poem). In a way, it is the perfect preamble to his career, the sketch of an ambition to match the imaginative structures of the greatest: Wordsworth's cathedral, the halls of gold in Keats's "Hyperion," Shelley's dome, and Whitman's America of the equally "lusty and plenteous."

The question of why Stevens dropped this poem is perhaps best answered by Harmonium itself. Though the book's title implies a totality (Stevens was later to want "The Whole of Harmonium" to be the title of his collected poems), it also refers to a musical instrument, something which exists at the players' fingertips. The second perspective is suggested by the emphasis on movement in the two poems which bracket "Architecture," "Life is Motion" and "The Wind Shifts," but even more directly by "Piano Practice at the Academy of Holy Angels" and other poems which see the poet as musician: "All of them, darkened by time, moved by they know not what, amending the airs they play to fulfill themselves" (OP 21). Time, darkness, and the obscurity of poetic sources; amendment in time, the poet playing for himself rather than an audience: these thoughts imply a suspicion of architecture. The need for movement precludes planning. As Stevens was to remark in 1948, "constant shaping, as distinguished from constancy of shape, is

characteristic of the poet" (OP 262-63). In one of the Adagia notes he wrote "Poetry is a renovation of experience," adding the gloss "Originality is an escape from repetition" (OP 177).[1] The architectural term "renovation" suggests a process of continued updating, as does the word which he used in a 1942 letter to Jean Wahl, "refacement" (L 431).[2] Poetry continually builds amidst its own wreckage.

Despite such qualifications, Stevens use ideas of architecture and the constructed object throughout his career. Most commonly, "structure" refers to poetry in general, rather than to his own career, as in his "Three Academic Pieces" (1947), where he argues that the structure of art must "resemble" the structure of reality until "the total artifice reveals itself / As the total reality" (NA 71, 87). He also continued to build his career, and one might see an architectural concern, for example, in some of his late minor works: an intention to flesh out his corpus and leave no turn unexplored. Poems like "The Souls of Women at Night" and "Solitaire under the Oaks" isolate certain extremities of mood. "The Desire to Make Love in a Pagoda" and other poems isolate aspects of human possibility: "Among the second selves, sailor, observe / The rioter that appears when things are changed" (OP 91). The titles of these poems themselves suggest that they are fragments of a larger whole, studies or characters which are unified within a typology or overall design (in contrast to the striking but more self-sufficient titles of the sketches of Harmonium). There is "One of the Inhabitants of the West," "Two Illustrations of . . . ," "The Final Soliloquy of . . . ," "The Song of . . . ," and so on. It would be wrong to push such

1. See A. Walton Litz, "Particles of Order: The Unpublished Adagia," in A Celebration, p. 75.
2. On this metaphor and the lack of origins or end-points, see Joseph G. Kronick, "Large White Man Reading: Stevens' Genealogy of the Giant," WSJ, 7 (1983), 89-98; and Eleanor Cook, "The Decreations of Wallace Stevens," WSJ, 4 (1980), 46-57.

an argument too far, but clearly the solidification of Stevens' discourse in his mature style does allow him to postulate a "Grand Poem" which underlies the fragmentary efforts and "notes." Indeed, it may have been this sense of a buried unity which allowed him, as Joseph Riddel argues, to publish so many lesser works.[1]

At the same time Stevens continued to argue <u>against</u> the aesthetic implications of the architectural idiom. In "The Man with the Blue Guitar" the interior of the cathedral is desiccated: the "nuptial song" is outside its consecrated walls (CP 181). "The shapes are wrong." But the poem characteristically depends both on ideas of shape and of music, just as Stevens' verse in his middle period draws upon both music and art (cubism in particular) -- a fact which is ignored by critics who insist, as Robert DeMaria does, that for Stevens "<u>ut musica poesis</u> is a more important and lofty analogy than the classical comparison to architecture which is part and parcel of the Horatian <u>ut pictura poesis</u>."[2] The fact that Stevens needed to deal with the idea of overall structure, if only to doubt it, suggests that it remained with him as an issue. The debate continues even beyond "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," which echoes "Architecture" in arguing both that we abandon the "hymn" for the "hotel," and also that the "impoverished architects" of the self can be revitalized by reality; and which ends by counterbalancing "final form"

1. Riddel, <u>The Clairvoyant Eye</u>, pp. 8, 11, 278. Riddel uses a mixture of structural metaphors and emphasis on the poem as process which he unifies by a rather vague appeal to our sense of the poetic "self" behind these terms. This, however, tells us little about Stevens' attitude to the problem of overall design. Riddel's critical position has, in fairness to him, changed considerably since he wrote the book quoted.
2. Robert DeMaria Jnr., "'The Thinker as Reader': The Figure of the Reader in the Writing of Wallace Stevens," <u>Genre</u>, 12 (1979), 243-68. See, however, Dorathea K. Beard, "A Modern <u>Ut Pictura Poesis</u>: The Legacy of Fauve Color in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens," <u>WSJ</u>, 8 (1984), 3-17.

with the "philosopher practising scales on his piano" (CP 469-88).[1] Even in the 1952 "The World as Meditation," Stevens exploits the ambiguity offered by the word compositeur: performer and builder.[2]

The interpretation of passages like those which end "An Ordinary Evening" depends on how transcendental one sees the late Stevens as being. But it would be reasonable to expect some resolution of the dialectic sketched above, as he approached the end of his life and saw his Collected Poems published. Some of his most cogent late thoughts on the product of an artist's career are contained in his 1951 essay "The Relations between Poetry and Painting." He includes an account of the debate between constructivist and subjectivist theories of art. In it, he seems to favour the constructivist position: the origins of poetry are not so much in the "sensibility" as in the "constructive faculty, that derives its energy more from the imagination than from the sensibility." It is "an effort of the mind" (NA 164-65). There is thus in art "a laborious element" which becomes in time "a consummation," an achieved perfection. One critic has argued that this essay shows that "'construction' supplants 'inspiration' as a creative metaphor" in late Stevens, linking this to Cézanne's concept of realization.[3] But Stevens, for all his interest in the aesthetic of modern art, clung at the same time to more traditional modes of understanding. In the same essay he produces the balanced formula "The labour of calculation, the appetite for perfection" (NA 166), where the second phrase points to something

1. See particularly section VII, which echoes "Architecture" at a number of points.
2. See Loren Rusk, "Penelope's Creative Desiring: 'The World as Meditation,'" WSJ, 9 (1985), 16-17.
3. Fred Miller Robinson, "'Poems that Took the Place of Mountains': Realization in Stevens and Cézanne," CentR, 22 (1978), 255-80. On the other hand, Lisa Steinman argues that the ideas of "play" and "excess" developed in the late essays draw attention to the process of imagination rather than to its product: a view which suggests the opposite of Robinson's conclusion in the article cited above. See Lisa M. Steinman, "A Dithering of Presences: Style and Language in Stevens' Essays," CL, 21 (1980), 100-17.

within the artist. Later in the same essay, he clearly implies that greatness is within the artist: the artist has a "vatic stature" which "He need not exercise . . . in vatic works" (NA 171).

It is only in 1951, after Stevens' year of consolidation, that anything like a resolution can be seen. One alternative is sketched in "A Quiet Normal Life":

> His place, as he sat and thought, was not
> In anything that he constructed, so frail,
> So barely lit, so shadowed over and naught. . . .
> (CP 523)

There is an ambiguity here about the modifiers (do they apply to "place" or to his construction?), which spills over into the next stanza's subordinate clause: "As, for example, a world in which, like snow, / He became an inhabitant. . . ." If Stevens means that "his place" was a world in which he is like snow, then the poem can be seen as modelled on "The Snow Man." If the world of snow is part of the negated object clauses (his constructions), then Stevens asserts that he is not to be equated with what he has made.[1] The ambiguity is only relaxed in the third stanza, with the declaration "It was here" (which grammatically, though not inevitably, implies that all of the second stanza is part of the negated object). The rest of the poem celebrates the virtues of home and what Stevens elsewhere calls "local objects," rejecting "transcendent forms" for the "actual candle."

In contrast to this ambiguity, there is the relative optimism of "The Poem that Took the Place of Mountain":

> There it was, word for word.
> The poem that took the place of a mountain.
>
> He breathed its oxygen,
> Even when the book lay turned in the dust of his table.

1. Merle Brown argues that this distinction is apparent in Stevens' work as early as "The Man With the Blue Guitar," at least, adding that "Any number of Stevens' later poems develop this sense of a difference between the ego and the imaginative act of a poem." Merle E. Brown, The Poem as Act (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), pp. 31-33.

> It reminded him how he had needed
> A place to go in his own direction. . . . (CP 512)

Like "The Planet on the Table" this is a poem in which Stevens recognises his "unique and solitary home" in his poetry. The crucial thing is the "consummation" which he had described in the 1951 essay, achieved through a perspective that looks not forward (to future compositions) but back. His poems have "reminded him" that he has arranged the world to his own satisfaction; and, in a scene borrowed from Keats, it is the view "gazing down at the sea" that he recognises that he has come home to himself in "an unexpected completion."[1] The poem could be entitled "On Last Looking into Stevens' Ulysses," coming as it does amidst all those late poems in which Stevens has his mariner touch shore and find his Penelope, or travel on in hope. Completion and achievement are a function of endings and a retrospective vision.

The only poem that does take place of a mountain in Stevens' work is the 1943 "Chocorua to Its Neighbour." The formula "He breathed its oxygen" in the poem above recalls stanza XXIII of the earlier poem:

> The air changes, creates and re-creates, like strength,
> And to breath is a fulfilling of desire,
> A clearing, a detecting, a completing,
> A largeness lived and not conceived. . . . (CP 301)

The later poem takes up and uses the same themes in order to affirm that the completed work is a fulfillment within which the writer may live and move: it is, in a sense, his home. The architecture of that home is an architecture of breath.[2]

1. For an analysis of this poem which discusses the apparent allusion to Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," see Malcolm Bradbury, "An Ironic Romantic: Three Readings in Wallace Stevens," In America Poetry, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies, 7 (London: Edward Arnold, 1965), pp. 170-71.
2. Adelaide Morris, in her Wallace Stevens: Imagination and Faith (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), esp. pp. 66-79, shows the importance of the idea of "breath" in Stevens' later work; though she perhaps over emphasizes the religious associations of the word.

Such ideas are nowhere more apparent than in Stevens' 1952 poem "St. Armourer's Church From the Outside." The cathedral is immovable and "deaf-mute," no longer able to guarantee immortality. But there is a "chapel of breath" within it, "an ember yes among cindery noes" which survives as a "new-coloured sun," or rather "like a new-colored sun" (CP 529). The metaphor exists within metaphor, just as the chapel exists within the cathedral's ruins:

> no sign of life but life,
> Itself, the presence of the intelligible
> In that which is created as its symbol.
>
> It is like a new account of everything old. . . .

The chapel is a perpetual renewal, symbol not only of American poetry ("A civilization formed from the outward blank") but of all poetic renewal, "Of that which is always beginning, over and over." The "chapel of breath" thus exists outside conventional monumental thought, as "becoming" rather than "being." The poet makes it from reality, "The origin and keep of its health and his own. / And there he walks and does as he lives and likes" (CP 530). The use of "keep" -- both a verb and architectural noun -- reflects perfectly the poem's argument. The poet is inside his own constructions, which are the very source of his life.

The most important late poem in which Stevens uses the idea of the career as a structure is "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," the poem on George Santayana which he wrote as a kind of a pre-elegy, probably in early 1952.[1] In it, Stevens allows himself a more transcendent stance than in almost any other poem. "On the threshold of heaven" the old philosopher unifies the world of imagination and that of reality -- "the two alike in the make of the mind" (CP 508) -- and in "the spirit's greatest reach" an apotheosis is achieved in the final stanza:

1. The term "pre-elegy" is Bloom's, Wallace Stevens, p. 361. The poem was written some months before Santayana's death.

> Total grandeur of a total edifice,
> Chosen by an inquisitor of structures
> For himself. He stops upon this threshold,
> As if the design of all his words takes form
> And frame from thinking and is realized. (CP 510-11)

Part of the thinking behind the poem is that, as we saw earlier, Stevens saw Santayana's life as one which had become a work of art. He is washed clean of the normal compromises with existence, even if Christ-like he turns back to the "Profound poetry of the poor and of the dead." But the nature of Santayana's thought is also important. Having suggested in 1940 that he veered too much towards the philosophical, Stevens finally saw him as "not a philosopher in any austere sense," one of those figures that hover (like Stevens) on the borderlines between philosophy and poetry; a man who could doubt his own work's finality (L 378, 637). It is thus important that his structures are known as structures of the imagination ("and yet / No more than a bed, a chair and moving nuns"), and also that they are his own, "Chosen by an inquisitor of structures / For himself." This has none of the artificiality of Stevens' allegorical elegy for Henry Church, "The Owl in the Sarcophagus," with its "inventions of farewell." In the earlier poem, Church is guarded by a number of symbolic figures; but in the poem on Santayana there is no need for such abstraction: the "book and candle" are enough, and we are inside the mind of the philosopher with whom Stevens identifies so strongly.

This does not mean that Santayana is disconnected from the world. As stanzas 13 and 14 emphasize, the sounds of the city and of bells penetrate the room "Unwilling that mercy should be a mystery of silence." The final edifice is constructed from reality: "It is part of the life in your room. / Its domes are the architecture of your bed"

(CP 510). Rather, this final construction exists at a limit which is an ideal point of balance between mind and world, held in the mind. The tentativeness of the formulae underscores the metaphoricity of the architecture:

> It is a kind of total grandeur at the end. . . .
>
> As if the design of all his words takes form. . . .

The "as if" suggests not identity, but rather an easiness of flow between self and construct. It is important to remember that this is an act of the mind. Stevens borrowed a question from Valéry in the "Two Prefaces" which he wrote in 1952-53: "To construct oneself, to know oneself -- are these two distinct acts or not?" (OP 272). If the Santayana elegy suggests that at the end of a life the self-knowledge of the old philosopher becomes the structure within which he lives, it is his structure, his understanding, and he takes it with him. Those who are not at the end of a life in philosophy remain inside the partial world of the even later "July Mountain": "in a constellation / Of patches and of pitches, / Not in a single world" (OP 114). As such, we are "thinkers without final thoughts." In Santayana's case it is the finality of his thoughts that allows the consummation.

Stevens' recurrent emphasis on the dynamic nature of literary career is most satisfactorily reconciled (though not architecturally) with the idea of a completed structure in a note which Stevens wrote in 1953 on Raoul Dufy. Here is how we should read the corpus:

> seeing how the artist is enabled, to carry lightly the burden imposed on him by a great work, until, when it is finished, we have, not a memorial of work but the happiness of the artist who has achieved what he wanted to achieve as artist. . . .
>
> (OP 287)

This happiness is not quite the Barthesian emphasis on the erotics of

reading, because Stevens' focus is -- crucially -- on the achieved happiness of the artist at the end of his opus, looking back at it. As he wrote: "We never arrive intellectually. But emotionally we arrive constantly (as in poetry, happiness, high mountains, vistas)" (OP 173).

A great burden is thus placed on the ending of the artist's career. In his works after the "crisis" year of 1951 Stevens sometimes allows himself to go beyond an emphasis on the author's sense of completion to the depiction of a final scene (like Santayana's). A passage from the same essay illustrates this focus on endings:

> The lithographs leave us feeling that the dissipations of life inevitably resolve themselves into a final scene, a scene that fills us with optimism and satisfaction as the characters leave the stage with all the lights burning. Is not that, after all, the chief effect of this pageant? Is not the principal thing that the individuality of Dufy should be coordinating force and high issue of all these details? . . . These great blues of Dufy are a kind of assertion of strength. They create a human self-confidence, as if one had known from the beginning the inevitable denouement of knowledge, so long postponed and so incredible. (OP 289)

There are references here to a number of earlier poems -- to the final scene demanded in "As at a Theatre," to the "pageant and procession and display" of Stevens' grandson in "Questions Are Remarks," to the themes of the last poems that he wrote: "As You Leave the Room," "A Mythology Reflects Its Region," "The Palm at the End of the Mind." There is no "point of central arrival" except that which is involved in the writer's sense of happiness at his achievement. As with Dufy -- as indeed with the late Hardy -- it is the artist's consciousness which supplies the sense of a life as a unity to the audience who view the pageant.

4.2.2 Statues, Books, Garments: "The End of Artifice"

In previous chapters, I examined the use which Hardy and Yeats both made of the idea of a monumental art in a way which can be related to the literary "corpus" and the poet"s relationship to his materials and audience. A similar type of analysis can be applied to Stevens' work. Both the book and the statue are images which he uses in attempting to unify the world of art and the public sphere within which his art is disseminated. It is possible to trace the development of these images to his late career, and a point where there is a split between them, the inner life becoming that of the book; the life of the work after death the statue or a closely related image, the poet's garment or clothing.

Stevens makes extensive use of monumental imagery in his early poems, but the results are seldom satisfactory. Part of the problem was the difficulty of formulating a public monumental art. In a perceptive article on "The Public Monument and Public Poetry" in Stevens, Berryman, and Lowell, Michael North suggests that all these poets attempt to use the public monument as a type of a literature which engages the community. In each case the effort fails. In "Owl's Clover," "The symbols which might replace the statue inevitably become absolutely private, and end up reproducing the rigidity and isolation that made the statue unsatisfactory. And the communal symbols . . . finally exclude the poet."[1] This is as true of Stevens' earlier poems on statuary, like "Dance of the Macabre Mice" and "The American Sublime." The tension between a dubious public art and a private symbolism is suggested by Stevens' own explanation of his use of the statue in "Owl's Clover," in a letter to Ronald Lane Latimer: in "The Old Woman and the Statue" it is

1. Michael North, "The Public Monument and Public Poetry: Stevens, Berryman, and Lowell," CL, 21 (1980), 267-85.

"a symbol of art," whereas in "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue" it is "broadened" into "things as they are" (L 290-91).

The same tension between the public role of the artist -- "the poet as / Eternal chef d'orchestre" (CP 136) -- and the writer's private mythology is visible in a number of poems of the thirties and early forties. Where Stevens uses the generic, "we" usually seems to be a form of "I" washed of its personal connotations, as at the end of "Evening without Angels" where "the voice that is great within us rises up, / As we stand gazing at the rounded moon" (CP 138). A good perspective on the role of statuary in this period is provided by his essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1941), which takes as its starting point Verrocchio's statue of General Jackson. The essay moves through a series of dialectically conceived topics of the "imagination and reality" type before Stevens moves from the poet to his products. At the limit of utterance, the words are all-important, and we seek "a finality, a perfection, an unalterable vibration which it is only within the power of the acutest poet to give them" (NA 32). Poetry is "words," and Stevens comments that he might have spent less time discussing the poet's identity if he were not afraid of seeming too "rhetorical."

The desire not to seem too "rhetorical" is a difficulty in seeing what it is in words that corresponds to what he calls the "occasional ecstasy" of the poet. Any public monument or work of art must measure up to the internalized tradition which he calls the "cemetery of nobilities," and Stevens can only see a decline in nobility in his age (NA 33). "Nobility" is reduced to being at best an inner quality, akin to a poetic libido rather than a public standard. It is a "force," "a violence from within which protects us from a violence without" (NA 36).

Externalised, nobility is "dead" and "repulsive": "a wave is a force and not the water of which it is composed, so nobility is a force and not the water of which it is composed" (NA 35-36). The same uneasiness about the poet's work as a real image is suggested by "Man Carrying Thing," a poem which, B.J. Leggett argues, picks up some of the themes and sources of "The Noble Rider" in order to set out how poems can be read.[1] In particular, the reader should not mistake the "secondary" for the "primary" -- the printed words for the thoughts behind them. There is "A horror of thoughts that suddenly are real" (CP 350). It is only at the limit of concentration that the poem can be realized: "We must endure our thoughts all night, until / The bright obvious stands motionless in cold." Even in Stevens' later poetry, the "bright obvious" of statuary is often compromised -- the equestrian statue of General Du Puy in "Notes," for example, is "so rigid" that he is "a bit absurd" (CP 391).

If the public nature of the poet's works thus presented a problem for Stevens, then one "solution" lies, I think, in his attitude to what physically enshrines or "monumentalizes" what the poet produces -- the book. Stevens showed a great interest in books as objects, particularly in the 1940s, assiduously searching for skilled binders, asking for special inscriptions from authors, and frequently referring to the appearance or rarity of books. In part, this is the emphasis on style which critics often see as central to his self-definition. The outward show is part of the meaning and decorum of art.[2] But more importantly, the question of <u>value</u> which is raised by the rare books sets up a network

1. B.J. Leggett, "Stevens' Psychology of Reading: 'Man Carrying Thing' and Its Sources," <u>WSJ</u>, 6 (1982), 51-59.
2. See Kermode, "Dwelling Poetically," pp. 256-57; and Stevens' references to bindings L 408, 417, 462, 488, 503, 504, 547, 698, 702. In general, Stevens liked strong primary colours, with pale bindings as a ground, describing the desired effect as "masculine." He was careful, however, to warn against excess, or garish colour clashes.

of affiliations between those who produce and those who value the product. The rare book provides a small but select audience -- Milton's "fit audience, though few" -- and a value for the work which is confirmed in the social currency of hard cash, but is also defined in terms of incidentals -- print-run, binding, the author's "name" -- which do not infringe on the creative integrity of the author. The audience is confirmed, but distanced. At worst, Stevens' attitude could be Pooteresque, as when he wrote to Sister Quinn in 1953 that poetry was too seldom "the pursuit of elevation," adding: "It often seems like a soiled towel, so rarely like the right linen, as it is with you and other right people" (L 774). On the other hand, Stevens' book-making seems to have allowed him to achieve a sense of the validity and solidity of his own work in the 1930s and 1940s.

Such attitudes approach what could be called "fetishism." The writer becomes a collectable good, a commodity, just as Stevens at times seems to be treating his correspondents in exotic places as collectables, fascinated by their distance and exclusivity. Communication is hardly the point, so long as you have the man. In 1950 he wrote to Rodriguez Feo: "I love the sense of reading an exquisite man whom very few people know anything about and with whom there are no vulgarizations whatever associated" (L 688). He was probably referring to a copy of Fargue's Poemès which he had received from Paris; and in a letter to Mrs. Church he jokes about his fetishization of it:

> It seems that this volume contains the best of Fargue and, if so, I shall carry it about with me a bit. I like the idea of a book as a talisman to take the place of a rabbit's foot: something that guards one in the midst of everything profane.
> (L 682)

In part, this represents the askesis of the late Stevens; there is too

much to be read, and the response is a defense-mechanism which cuts down the number of important works. A few years earlier he had written of "the flood of books coming from nothing and going back to nothing" which sickened him (L 624). But the passage quoted also suggests the way in which a work of art can come to represent a person. Fargue's book contains the best of the author; Allen Tate's Collected Poems is "the Document of Allen Tate" (he wrote to Tate, seemingly without having read them) (L 578). Potentially, all these are reifications like that in an early journal entry: "Fénélon.--The name is enough" (L 105). The book is thus the poet's corpus in the most attenuated possible fashion; it is that part of him which can be disseminated without any sense of real contact.

In Stevens' late poetry there is, however, a completely different set of images associated with books and readers, which refer to a corpus which is much closer to the private self of the poet. The book in Stevens' later work often corresponds to a state freed from the world's turbulence, as a number of critics have noticed.[1] In "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm" the book is a measure of the poet's desire for peace:

> The house was quiet and the world was calm.
> The reader became the book; and the summer night
>
> Was like the conscious being of the book.
> The house was quiet and the world was calm.
>
> The words were spoken as if there was no book,
> Except that the reader leaned above the page,

1. See Denis Donoghue, "Two Notes on Stevens," WSJ, 4 (1980), 40-45; Joseph Riddel, "Metaphoric Staging: Stevens' Beginning Again of the 'End of the Book,'" in A Celebration, pp. 308-338. Donoghue writes that "Stevens' Collected Poems, the big book, is ardent in wishing to give up its exteriority and to become, for every reader, an interior object" (p. 41). He does not suggest how this might come about, however. Riddel argues that the idea of the book is "emptied out" and replaced by that of writing, an interpretation which at best ignores Stevens' fascination with the book as an object. See also Kronick, "Of Parents, Children, and Rabbis," pp. 145-47.

> Wanted to lean, wanted much most to be
> The scholar to whom his book is true, to whom
>
> The summer night is like a perfection of thought.
>
> (CP 358)

This book represents a state of perfected consciousness, an interpenetration of world, composition, and composer in an apotheosis not easy to achieve. In a letter written a few years after this poem, Stevens wrote: "often when I am writing poetry I have in mind an image of reading a page of a large book," but added that what he wanted from the book was "normal life, insight into the commonplace" -- whereas the poems which he had just sent off were his normal exotica (L 642-43). At Stevens' most confident the book is completely internalized: the old man in "Credences of Summer" "reads no book," the man in "Things of August" and other poems are already texts.[1] The poet's composition, in such an ideal state, is like the book in Revelations -- it has been ingested.

Such a state can only exist dialectically. It represents as part of what in "An Ordinary Evening" is called "the poet's search for the same exterior made / Interior," in contrast to the public search for "an interior made exterior" (CP 281). We can see this distinction as suggesting Stevens' desire to unite the public philosopher and the private poet. In particular, he wished to deal with the subject of the "public" poet and the poetic corpus which is part of the "interior made exterior." In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the figures in Stevens' poetry which act as symbols for the "two bodies" of the writer, in a way which corresponds to the two types of "books" described above. The first such figure is, once again, that of the statue.

The statue, as I have suggested, often represents the externalized contents of the mind, though often in a static, "dead" fashion. In a

1. Woodward suggests that this implies that "the text is no longer necessary" (p. 109), ignoring the numerous subsequent references to texts or "men made out of words."

number of poems of the late 1930s, Stevens fulminates against the poet seeing himself as a statue. In "Prelude to Objects" (1938) he says the poet "has not / To go to the Louvre to behold himself" and moves from one sense to another in phrases like "Design / The Touch," and shifts from "marble" to "gluey pastiche." In a poem of 1939 he wishes for "the life / That is fluent in even the wintriest bronze" (CP 222). To become a statue is to be too like the frozen figure described in "Americana": "He is the image, the second, the unreal, / The abstraction. He inhabits another man, / Other men, and not this grass, this valid air" (OP 94).

In later poems, Stevens continues to satirize such figures -- in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," for example, he comments on how "the spectator also moves / With lesser things, with things exteriorised / Out of rigid realists" (CP 470). In other poems, he seems to be examining the implications of such thought. In "Conversation With Three Women of New England" he comments that "The contents of the mind become solid show / Or almost solid show" -- an illustration of how "The mode of the person becomes the mode of the world / For that person, and sometimes, for the world itself" -- a finely balanced proposition that once again suggests the difficulty of public utterance. He then anatomizes three poetic modes, one of which, described in terms redolent of Shelley's Ozymandias, is the Romantic, with its belief

> That a figure reclining among columns toppled down,
> Stiff in eternal lethargy, should be,
> Not the beginning but the end of artifice. . . . (OP 109)[1]

The conclusion suggests merely that it is "enough to realize / That the sense of being changes as we talk," but the poem is interesting for its sense that the corpus as public statuary decays. In another late poem, "Two Illustrations That the World Is What You Make of It" (1952,

1. The other two modes might be called the mystic -- believing in "The one thing common in all life" -- and the Nietzschean, believing that "the author of man's canons is man."

probably), the first section concerns the poet's being as shadow and breath. The second illustration turns to the remainder, that which survives death:

> He left half a shoulder and half a head
> To recognize him in after time.
>
> These marbles lay weathering in the grass. . . . (CP 514)

In poems like this, the statue acts as a metaphor for the poet's corpus as it survives him: a consummation which is not particularly to be wished for in life, and a shattered remnant after life rather than the proud edifice described (but also denied) in "The Noble Rider." The decay of the corpus into the landscape which is depicted in "Two Illustrations" is like the merging of the poet and his region in "A Mythology Reflects Its Region." Like Hardy, Stevens insists that the "image" of the creator must be part of "the substance of his region," his corpus itself a part of reality (OP 118).

If the statue involves a pure exteriority, then a more dynamic figure for <u>both</u> aspects of the poetic corpus in Stevens' late work is the traditional metaphor of language as the garment of thought -- a garment which, as in some of Hardy's late works, can be cast aside. Such a figure is at its most allegorical in the poem which could be called Stevens' "anatomy of death," his elegy "The Owl in the Sarcophagus." Henry Church's death is attended by three figures. The first is "high sleep," a representation of something like the meditational state of the poet as he enters death. "Sleep" has "unique composure" and is described in terms of "the whiteness that is the ultimate intellect, / A diamond jubilance beyond the fire" (CP 433) -- a vocabulary almost suggestive of Dante's Virgil. "Sleep" is also portrayed in terms of completion and a retrospective vision -- he is compared to a "moving mountain" like "The

Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain," and with a similar "fulfilling air." His brother, "High Peace," is statue-like. He is described as a "godolphin and fellow" (a horse and rider), like the equestrian statue of "The Noble Rider," and there is "The brilliant height / And hollow of him. . . ." In contrast to the whiteness of "Sleep," he is green and fecund:

> Adorned with cryptic stones and sliding shines,
> An immaculate personage in nothingness,
> With the whole spirit sparkling in its cloth,
>
> Generations of the imagination piled
> In the manner of its stitchings, of its thread,
> In the weaving around the wonder of its need,
>
> And the first flowers upon it, an alphabet
> By which to spell out holy doom and end. . . . (CP 434)

"Peace" is both an aspect of death and of the poetic tradition. The "generations of the imagination" stitched into his robe imply that he is the guardian of the poet within the tradition: "formed / Out of our lives to keep us in our death, / To Watch us in the summer of Cyclops / Underground. . . ." He is thus essentially prospective. His fecundity -- "A thousand begettings of the broken bold" -- is a product of a tradition which is enriched by the death of the poet.[1] The third figure in this poem is even more mysterious, and seems to represent the moment of death itself; she is "tall in self not symbol" and, implicitly, casts the garment of poetry aside.

Figures similar to "Peace" occur in a number of late poems. In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" the overtones are comic. If tradition can guard and enrich, it can also reduce, or represent, in life, a petrifaction. This is the plight of the "architects" of Section VII:

1. Berger, pp. 123-24, argues that "Peace" guards "a dead tradition," and appropriates glory to itself. The first claim is contradicted by the details of the poem; the second mistakes the function of these figures as symbols for a reality: each has its appointed realm.

> It is as if
> Men turned into things, as comedy,
> Stood, dressed in antic symbols, to display
>
> The truth about themselves, having lost, as things,
> The power to conceal they had as men. . . . (CP 470)

The antidote is a return to life, inhaling "a health of air / To our sepulchral hollows" (hollowness again suggesting cast bronze). The poet should not mistake the construct and its survival for life, as "the man / Of bronze whose mind was made up" does slightly later in the poem. Alternatively, the poet can seem to be locked into a vatic stance, producing a kind of self-parody of the "high serious" which Stevens describes in section XVII -- a figure wearing "Gold easings and ouncings and fluctuations of thread / And beetling of belts and lights of general stones" (CP 477). This Mosaic figure in its "robe of rays" and its opposite, the comic poet, are both rejected in favour of the poetry of reality. When the "Ruler of Reality" appears near the end of the poem, he "abolishes . . . the regalia, / The attributions, the plume and helmet-ho" (CP 485). If, as one critic argues, the poem proceeds by hollowing out its central images, then it also suggests that the poet's public status is also hollow -- a procedure culminating in the "Mr. Blank" of the final stanza, with his busts and photographs.[2]

"An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" is followed in the Collected Poems by "Things of August," which again tends to split the poet from his poetry, and begins, as my earlier reading suggested, to focus on the poet as a text. In section VIII Stevens asks "When was it that the particles became / The whole man, that tempers and beliefs became / Temper and belief . . . ?" (CP 494). The answer is that things come together when

1. Berger, pp. 123-24, argues that "Peace" guards "a dead tradition," and appropriates glory to itself. The first claim is contradicted by the details of the poem; the second mistakes the function of these figures as symbols for a reality: each has its appointed realm.
2. See Michael Beehler, "Stevens' Boundaries," WSJ, 7 (1983), 99-107.

the poet meets "the archaic form / Of a woman with a cloud on her shoulder" -- a figure like death in "The Owl in the Sarchophagus," but also like Keats's deadly muse with her "cloudy trophies."[1] He thus achieves unity at the point of death, when he becomes part of poetic history. The text, meanwhile, is an internalized ornament:

> He wears the words he reads to look upon
> Within his being
> A crown within him of crispest diamonds,
> A reddened garment falling to his feet. . . . (CP 492)

In "As at a Theatre," a poem written soon after this, Stevens imagines a paradise in which there is "another being, / Ragged in unkempt perceptions" -- a figure which disdains dress but nevertheless "meditates an image of itself" (OP 91). The same type of description is visible in the "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour":

> we collect ourselves,
> Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:
> Within a single thing, a single shawl
> Wrapped tightly round us. . . . (CP 524)

The shawl is "thought." As Stevens suggests in the 1952 "Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly," "we put mantles on our words" because they are our body, in a sense which for Stevens as he grew old became increasingly <u>the</u> sense in which he understood the body. In the late poetry other examples of the works as clothing include those in "The Sail of Ulysses" (sections III and VIII) and "The World as Meditation." In the former there is "the thinker / Thinking golden thoughts in a golden mind, / Loftily jingled" (OP 100) -- the text in the mind -- and the "englistered woman, seated / In colorings harmonious" who is the "self as sibyl" (OP 104). She is characterized by her poverty, an interior nakedness which must be clothed, just as the figure in the

1. On the Keatsian tone of Stevens' last poems, see Vendler, <u>Part of Nature</u>, ch. 3; and Betty Buchsbaum, "Stevens and Keats's 'Easeful Death': A Revision of Youth by Old Age," <u>WSJ</u>, 6 (1982), 87-99.

"Final Soliloquy" is clothed by the "single shawl." The text thus clothes and protects the poet up to the point at which he can abandon it.

Stevens' consideration of the nature of the poet's productions and his "public" self can, I think, be seen in the images which I have discussed. The statue or public monument is problematic: frozen or hollow, and as a figure for the corpus after death pictured as a decaying romantic fragment. The book as object is more neutral, but also potentially much more revealing -- both physical object and a metaphor for the poet's innermost self. The image of the robed figure mediates, in a sense, between these two possibilities: the text may be worn, and at crucial moments cast aside, leaving the poet or "self as sibyl" naked beneath it. Moreover, the text is seen, in the poems which use this image, as a protective covering, or even -- edging towards the internalized "book" -- as worn within the poet. It has little "public" significance. In his poems after 1950 Stevens often describes himself as ghost-like, as "Transparent man in a translated world." Both poet and his region have become texts, with all that implies for Stevens in terms of metamorphosis and change. The poet almost vanishes into the structure of breath which I described. "No doubt we live beyond ourselves in air" (CP 518), as he puts it in "Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly," a poem which ends with what could be called Stevens' ultimate description of the poet's remainder: "a spirit's mannerism, / A glass aswarm with things going as they can."

4.3 The Poet at the Limit

I have examined some of the ways in which Stevens allowed himself a qualified sense of completion at the end of his life, but also suggested that the corpus is an "insolid" thing: perhaps a structure of air, a shattered statue, or a discarded garment. There is in his late work an active doubt about the structures both of his own work and belief in general, and when he wrote that "modern reality is a reality of decreation," Stevens provided a clue to this element in his poetry which many writers have seized -- though not without disagreement.[1] In the section which follows, I will show how the decreative impulse in Stevens works in a way which is analogous to Yeats's late turnings-against-the-self, both discarding the previous work of the author and -- through an association of the poet's power with nature's -- allowing a continued creativity. In so doing, I hope to show that this late "organicity" of style and metaphor is related to Stevens' emphasis on theory in his late career.

4.3.1 Decreation and Organicity: Stevens' Late Energies

A number of Stevens' poems in later life seem fragmentary, unfinished, or perhaps, like "The Hermitage at the Centre," deliberately

1. Perhaps the most representative is Helen Reguerio, who argues that the imagination encounters reality "by turning its transforming and in that measure destructive power not against reality but against itself." The Limits of Imagination, p. 148. See also Pearce, "Toward Decreation," pp. 286-307; and Cook, "The Decreations of Wallace Stevens." Critics differ on the question of whether decreation is just one moment in Stevens' creative process (followed by the kind of romantic recuperation which Bloom insists is there: the "reimagining of the world") or whether it is a more fundamental skepticism (the position favoured by Heideggerian or deconstructionist critics). As I will suggest, Stevens adopts both these positions: at times "decreation" allows a new beginning, at times it suggests a final instability in the author's products.

difficult. As I have argued, self-curtailment is an important way in which Stevens guards himself from over-reaching. As he suggests, "Ignorance is one of the sources of poetry" (OP 173). The idea of being an amateur allows the poet to shrug off the Virgilian ambitions mocked in "Paisant Chronicle," and can be allied to the aesthetic of incompletion which underlies "Notes towards . . ." and other fragments. In the last ten years of his life he used his theoretical writings to provide a firm basis for the fragmentary and decreative efforts of his later work. Such theorizing is also apparent in the poems. Jerome Griswold, for example, argues that in "Prologues to What Is Possible" Stevens uses Santayana's theory that the imagination is most easily seen in the mind's slips and mistakes.[1] Its "puissant flick" is not a clear light, but one which, candle-like, constantly falters. The irrational is "part of the dynamics of poetry" (OP 227), and "the unknown . . . is part of the dynamics of the known," as Stevens had argued earlier, adding that it is at poetry's "dynamic utmost" that the irrational becomes most important (OP 229). Similar ideas are included in his Adagia: "Man is an eternal sophomore," "The acquisitions of poetry are fortuitous; trouvailles. (Hence, its disorder.)," "The poet is the priest of the invisible" (OP 169). In "The Souls of Women at Night" the "chief personage" of the night possesses "metaphysical blindness gained, / The blindness in which seeing would be false" (OP 94-95), a metaphor which makes Stevens' obscurity deeper even than Milton's.

An even more important motive for the "decompositions" of Stevens' later poems can be found in the way in which he allies the mind to nature in them. If "In the world of words, the imagination is one of the forces

1. Jerome Griswold, "The Calculated Failures of 'Prologues to What Is Possible,'" WSJ, 6 (1982), 74-78. For a similar analysis, see also Griswold's "Santayana on Memory and 'The World as Meditation,'" WSJ, 3 (1979), 113-16.

of nature" (OP 170), then it is subject to the same powers of decay, the same irregularity, the same freedom from stasis. The consequences of such an aesthetic -- perhaps "strategy" would be a better word, since Stevens uses it as materia poetica rather than actually believing it -- are visible throughout his late works. The mind is a terrible force, and in poems like the 1945 "Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion" it beats up a storm which shifts about the stage machinery:

> It is a spectacle. Scene 10 becomes 11,
> In Series X, Act IV, et cetera.
>
> People fall out of windows, trees tumble down,
> Summer is changed to winter, the young grow old,
>
> The air is full of children, statues, roofs
> And snow. The theatre is spinning around. . . .
>
> (CP 357)

Like the wild wind and storm of "Puella Parvula," this is the prelude to a larger performance. The destructive forces of the mind lash like the wind, destroying the solidity of the world and in the space that is cleared a new poem will rise.

The "spectacle" so created is not simply the revaluation of (poetic) values which was part of Stevens' conscious programme. While it is a commonplace that he scrutinizes or "deconstructs" the idea of final form in his later poetry, it is less often pointed out that the images which Stevens treats in this way are often those of his early poetry. There are a number of poems which rather than summing up the history of an image serve almost as palinodes. One example is "The Green Plant" (CP 506), with its suggestion of one of the most famous of the poems from Harmonium, "Tea." The "elephant's-ear in the park" and shades "like umbrellas in Java" of the ornate earlier poem seem to be travestied in the opening lines of the poem of 1952:

Silence is a shape that has passed
Otu-bre's lion-roses have turned to paper
And the shadows of the trees
Are like wrecked umbrellas.

The effete vocabulary of summer
No longer says anything. (CP 506)

Both poems are set in the gap between autumn and winter, but where the first poem sets up a counter-world, the second condemns the "constant secondariness" of the imagination which does not make its peace with the barbarity of reality and silence. The imagination is no longer a sun in this poem: rather there are "falsifications from a sun / In a mirror, without heat," lines which place the poem in Stevens' late return to the thematics of winter. The "green plant" is a survivor rather than a thing interposed between mind and reality, and its strength lies in that survival.

Other examples of the same revision or decomposition of earlier images are "Farewell Without a Guitar" and "Vacancy in the Park," both poems of 1952. The former not only abandons the old instrument, but spring and its "thousand-leaved green" is replaced by the "thousand-leaved red" of autumn. There is a "horse . . . without a rider," a figure which recalls the "Noble Rider" of Stevens' essay.[1] The poem discovers "final constructions" even as it seeks "fresh senses":

The reflections and repetitions,
The blows and buffets of fresh senses
Of the rider that was,
Are a final construction,
Like glass and sun, of male reality
And of that other and her desire. (OP 99)

The Noble Rider, that is, is like the flashing of sun upon glass, the

1. The riderless horse is, of course, reminiscent of the "high horse riderless" of Yeats's "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931," another poem marking the decay of a poet's expectations. As Berger suggests, Forms of Farewell, pp. xiii-xiv, the late Yeats acted as a source for Stevens to an extent that has seldom been recognised; particularly in this decreative mode.

mating of desire and the mind; anything but the solid object Stevens considered in the essay. In "Vacancy in the Park," a synthesis of a number of Stevens' early images is used to produce yet another scene imbued with a sense of departure. One could compare it with many earlier poems. Here, for example, is "The Ordinary Women," a poem on the luxuriousness of poetry and the creative cycle:

> Then from their poverty they rose,
> From dry catarrhs, and to guitars
> They flitted
> Through the palace walls.
>
> They flung monotony behind,
> Turned from their want, and, nonchalant,
> They crowded
> The nocturnal halls. (CP 10)

"Vacancy in the Park" recreates a final poverty, just that emptiness which the early poem fills, but with the same images:

> March . . . Someone has walked across the
> snow,
> Someone looking for he knows not what.
>
> It is like a boat that has pulled away
> From a shore at night and disappeared.
>
> It is like a guitar left on a table
> By a woman, who has forgotten it.
>
> It is like the feeling of a man
> Come back to see a certain house.
>
> The four winds blow through the rustic arbour,
> Under its mattresses of vines. (CP 511)

The snow carries the message, the boat's voyage is ended, the guitar abandoned, the palace deserted. These "images of farewell" are forged out of a career's use.

Stevens' 1954 poem "Reality Is an Activity of the Most August Imagination" sees these processes of composition and decomposition at their most visible. As also in Stevens' earlier work, the result of the

poem's rhetorical strategies is a denial of the possibility that any poem can have a finally fixed form independent of the process of interpretation and re-construction. But here, that process itself seems to be a part of the poet's meditation, as life assembles itself into poetry. The poem's forms are almost self-consuming -- "Last Friday, in the big light of last Friday night" -- and the alliteration which we normally associate with an earlier Stevens reinforces the churning of a mind which composes and breaks down "an argentine abstraction approaching form / And suddenly denying itself away." The poem's metaphors mix and interpenetrate in that peculiar organicity: "It was not a night blown in a glassworks in Vienna / Or Venice" we are told, but instead there is "a crush of strength in a grinding going round," and then "a glittering in the veins, / As things emerged and moved and were dissolved" (OP 110-11). It is thus, tracing the metaphor within the metaphor, as if the glass of the old world is crushed and injected into the veins of the new. Even the final lines of the poem partake of this ceaseless movement in which tenor and vehicle suddenly reverse their relationship or are questioned: "There was an insolid billowing of the solid. / Night's moonlight lake was neither water nor air." Is it a lake like (or illuminated by) moonlight? A lakelike pool of watery moonlight? The solidity of reality billows "insolid" (inside the solid? Not solid?). "Reality" dissolves into "Activity"; the only reality is the transforming and metamorphizing power of the autumnal (August) imagination. And its venerable (or "august") status inheres in the "visible transformations of summer night." It belabours the poem to explicate, but the way in which it denies any one perspective implies that the reader must also read it as a shattered urn: it denies any distinction between metaphor and paraphrase, or between the world or words and that of "solid" objects.

The poem which follows this one in Opus Posthumous, "Solitaire Under the Oaks," describes one outcome of this decomposition and mixing of metaphors and seasons within the theatre of the mind. Signs and natural objects are, once again, equally implicated. If the world is, as Wittgenstein implied, the sum of all the facts in it, then Stevens writes of a pure negativity:

> In the oblivion of cards
> One exists among pure principles.
>
> Neither the cards nor the trees nor the air
> Persist as facts. This is an escape
>
> To principium, to meditation.
> One knows at last what to think about
>
> And thinks about it without consciousness,
> Under the oak trees, completely released.
>
> (OP III)

This is a good description of a meditative state produced by the collapse of the card-house of one's constructions. It is not the pure passivity to experience -- a pure seeing -- which Woodward and others ascribe to the late Stevens. Rather, it is a freedom from the need to see, or to compose topics. And it is, I would suggest, an ideal state rather than a real one, like the world of "pure principle" which George Santayana is depicted as entering on the point of death. Indeed, Stevens' vocabulary -- "oblivion," "escape," "without consciousness," "release" -- suggests death itself.

This clarity and the resolution of tensions between poet and world is apparent in many of Stevens' late short poems. There is "a healing-point in the sickness of the mind," the embracing of Orient and Occident, or the world throwing itself together; and perhaps most obscurely and revealingly, in "Banjo Boomer," a condition "With nothing fixed by a single word" (OP 114). "Banjo Boomer" is almost a poem about nothing; about the Mulberry which is a "double tree," both object and

symbol. The darkness of the mulberry, as its characteristics are declined and varied in the poem's strumming (banjo) rhythm, becomes a symbol for the ambiguity of the symbol, the "shade" within which the poet seeks refuge, perhaps also the shade of death, or what is sometimes called the negativity of signs. In so celebrating the disappearance of the object, language is freed, as in the "insolid billowing of the solid," to compose and recompose itself at the edge of the void. In his late work Stevens thus uses aging, and even death itself, to produce a type of poetry which celebrates decomposition and the freedom of the poet to form and reform his own world at will. The negativity of decay and death produce a release both from the poet's own past work, and -- for the poet, if not for his readers -- a perfected meditation.

The "decreative" tendency in Stevens' late works is a part of what I have called his late inwardness, and of a tendency to see his own work as its own kind of "reality" (somewhat in contrast to Stevens' expressed aim of writing the poetry <u>of</u> reality). It involves a self-concentration and an involvement in implicitly metatheoretical concerns which had always been a part of Stevens' poetry, but which, in some of the poems I have examined, influence his treatment of his own metaphors. In many of his late poems, the subject of the poem is metaphor itself. In a notebook entry probably written in the late 1940s, he wrote:

> There is no such thing as a metaphor of a metaphor. One does not progress through metaphors. Thus reality is the indispensable element of each metaphor. When I say that man is a god it is very easy to see that if I also say that a god is something else, god has become reality. (OP 179)[1]

The passage suggests a characteristic movement towards a "reality" which

1. See also Litz, "Particles of Order," p. 76. The previous entries in this untitled notebook include "Poetic Exercises of 1948," suggesting that the quoted adagia is later than that date.

is wound up a notch, so to speak, from the earlier one.[1] What was previously operative on the level of metaphor (or metaphor's vehicle, in terms of traditional analysis) is now reality; and thus art itself becomes reality and the poet moves into the structures he has built -- though they are now transparent and he sees through them. As a result, the topics often become less important in themselves, and what is important is the movement of the mind between them. The idea is like that of the differential in mathematics: the poet "measures the velocities of change," as Stevens puts it in "The Auroras" (CP 414).[2] This helps explains, I think, the relativisms and rhetorical oscillations of his later poems, the alternation between projected knowledge and its decreation. "The Auroras of Autumn" provides a number of useful illustrations of this movement, in which reality is present only in the mind's motions rather than in its findings.[3] The decreative ideal is present in the refrain "Farewell to an idea," and the poem pursues a series of changes in characteristic images like the blankness of winter, which grows "less vivid on the wall" while the poet "observes how the north is always enlarging the change" (section II); or the mother ("And yet she too is dissolved, she is destroyed" -- section III); or the "portico" which he borrowed from Baudelaire: "A capitol, / It may be, is emerging or has just / Collapsed. The denouement has to be postponed

1. Brown usefully suggests that this is a "seeing double," and comments that "There is an eye of eyes, an ear of ears, a voice of voices" in the late poems, in which unreal and real can suddenly reverse their relationship. The Poem as Act, p. 178. See also Riddel's comments. "Metaphoric Staging," p. 331, on points where "the word displaces meaning."
2. The mathematical differential (dy/dx) is precisely that: a velocity or rate of change.
3. A number of writers have emphasised mutability and metamorphosis as the main themes of "The Auroras." See Hines, The Later Poetry, p. 245; La Guardia, Advance on Chaos, p. 129 et passim; and, for a study entirely devoted to the work, Scott C. Fields, "Lyrical Form in Wallace Stevens' The Auroras of Autumn," DAI, 40 (1979), 2678A (New York University).

. . ." (section VI). Art becomes reality, as the symbolic figures begin to suspect "That there are no lines to speak? There is no play. / Or, the persons act one merely by being here." The "or" is typical of Stevens. The imagination which he celebrates is one which "in the midst of summer stops / To imagine winter" (though even this is followed by a teasing question mark), and as it sits enthroned on the edge of the abyss like Milton's Satan it abandons a sense of its own absolute destiny or identity, seeking its opposite:

> But it dare not leap by chance in its own dark.
> It must change from destiny to slight caprice.
> And thus its jetted tragedy, its stele
>
> And shape and mournful making move to find
> What must unmake it and, at last, what can,
> Say, a flippant communication under the moon. (CP 417-18)

The poem is characterized by its refusal to seek an ultimate reality, to see the dark as anything other than a station of the spirit. There is no <u>place</u> of innocence, Stevens argues in section VIII, but there may be a <u>time</u> of innocence which we invent for ourselves in order to begin again. The sense of movement is the imperative. The author's life is "in the idiom / Of the work" and the work itself becomes reality, the flickering of the auroras life embodied rather than represented.

Thus despite Stevens' denial that we can "progress through metaphors," there is something like progress "through" (and a "progress through") metaphors in his late work. There are a number of consequences of such an epistemology, both in terms of his late style and thematics. "Description without Place," written in 1945, is a good point to begin to examine these implications. Helen Vendler suggests that it is in this poem that "the characters of the author taken on for a moment a life of their own, as his adjectives become the principles of their action."[1] For Harold Bloom the poem argues that "the mind's images may be realized,

1. Vendler, <u>On Extended Wings</u>, p. 218

that tropes may be as well as seem."[1] The movement from "seeming" to "being" is important. Much of the poem focuses on the process of transformation, symbolised by the palm "a little different from reality" which "exists, / In its own seeming" -- it has its being, that is, in seeming. It rejuvenates the poet, as "A text we should be born that we might read," a new generation of the imagination (or the old poet as child). The poem is uncompromising in its textuality, containing the famous dictum "It is a world of words to the end of it" (CP 345), but the forces of nature are, through the palm (which is "desire") imported into the poem. It ends with a grammatical formula which reproduces, exactly, the movement from "seeming" to "being". What we say "must portend," and "Be alive with its own seemings, seeming to be / Like rubies reddened by rubies reddening." This is more than simply the traductio (or running of a word through various cases) which Mac Hammond describes in analysing Stevens' grammar, or the "incremental repetition" which Bloom describes.[2] "Seemings" can "Be alive," and the same movement is reinscribed ("seeming to be") before the second line, which "proves" the first in its transference of the verb "red" to its adjectival use (the past participle "reddened") from the verbal ("reddening"). The relationship of what is "like" to what "is" encapsulated in a homologous structure which blurs the distinction between the two. The same repetitive, near-tautologous effects are visible in the poems which follow this one: "Adult Epigram" and "Two Versions of the Same Poem" (subtitled "That Which Cannot Be Fixed"). In the first, Stevens picks up one of the Adagia, "The romantic exists in precision as well as in imprecision" (OP 171):

1. Bloom, Wallace Stevens, p. 239.
2. Mac Hammond, "On the Grammar of Wallace Stevens," in The Act of the Mind pp. 179-184; Bloom, Wallace Stevens, p. 243. The related figure of polyptoton (the repetition of different words with the same roots) is also a feature of Stevens' late style.

> The romance of the precise is not the elision
> Of the tired romance of imprecision.
> It is the ever-never-changing same,
> An appearance of Again, the diva-dame. (CP 353)

Precision is achieved not by a return to origins, but by a baroque repetition which concentrates on the flux itself. In "Men Made Out of Words," another poem of this period, we are told that "Life consists / Of propositions about life" (CP 355). In "Thinking of a Relation Between the Images of Metaphors" the pattern of repetitions and resemblances converges to a point at which "being" is not compromised by "seeming": "In that one eye the dove / Might spring to sight and yet remain a dove" (CP 357).

Many writers have commented on the special characteristics of Stevens' later style. Doggett points out that it is "permeated with the effects of apposition," and that sentence forms take on a metaphorical function, particularly those using the predicative nominative.[1] His conclusions are supported by R.H. Robilliard, writing on the parallel and repetitive forms in the late works.[2] A number of other critics argue that the action of the poem in Stevens always tends to be the movement between metaphors, and that his poems tend to break down any distinction between metaphor and reality.[3] As I have already suggested, phrases like "rubies reddened by rubies reddening" serve just such a function. "Life consists / Of propositions about life" has a similar logic. A number of other examples can be quickly provided from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." The poet "speaks / By sight and insight as they are," there is "the ponderable source of each imponderable," "Disillusion as the last

1. Frank Doggett, Wallace Stevens: The Making of the Poem (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 150-51.
2. R.H. Robilliard, "The Rhetoric of Wallace Stevens: He That of Repetition is Most Master," DAI, 24 (1964), 3757A (Brown University).
3. Brown, pp. 188-201; Suzanne Juhasz, Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens (Lewisburg, Va.: Bucknell University Press, 1974), pp. 158-60; Riddel, The Clairvoyant Eye, p. 15.

illusion," the "dilapidation of dilapidations" (a different and more reflexive figure, more strictly what Doggett has in mind), repetitive devices like "Flickings from finiken to fine finiken," and so on (CP 473-88). The theory of such formulae is developed in the 1947 "Three Academic Pieces." There, "The profusion of metaphor has been increased" to the extent that it seems to take on natural powers: "These casual exfoliations are / Of the tropic of resemblance, sprigs / Of Capricorn or as the sign demands" (NA 83, 86). The poem's final line -- "The inhuman making choice of a human self" -- suggests the same mixing of the natural and human orders, looking forward to the conclusion of "An Ordinary Evening" that there is "an alteration / Of words that was a change of nature."[1]

A more schematic way of explaining this movement is through the traditional analysis of tenor and vehicle in metaphor. In Stevens' late poems it is often the case that the image which was previously tenor of a metaphor becomes either the vehicle of a new metaphor, or part of a metonymic chain in which adjacent metaphors are linked together in a world whose parts are all metaphorical, in which the poet can see no "baseline" of common usage or reality. There are, of course, similar effects in earlier poems. But in Stevens' late work the "profusions" of metaphor are increased, and his own work is involved in the process, as his creative energies seem to become more self-referential and linked to the "decreative" powers of the mind. Perhaps the best example of this is the central poem of Stevens' late period, "The Rock." Seeking a "cure of

1. J. Hillis Miller, in a well-known article on Stevens' "The Rock," sees such constructions as creating a mise en abîme: "The relation among the elements of each series is undecidable, abyssed." "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," 13-14. Such an interpretation ignores the fact that their function in the text is to provide precisely that order within the play of signifiers which Stevens saw as part of the "tropic of resemblance," a symbolic imitation of natural profusion.

the ground" (which is itself ambiguous: the ground of being; the ground of the self?), Stevens says that it is not enough to "cover the rock with leaves" -- referring to the natural imagery of the poem's opening -- unless nature move in the poem; unless that which is metaphor (the leaves) is treated as real:

> And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
> If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,
>
> And if we ate the incipient colorings
> of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.
> (CP 526)

It is this which justifies the equation "These leaves are the poem, the icon and the man. / These are a cure of the ground and of ourselves." The growth of the leaves, the poem suggests, allows the poet to avoid the blankness of an eye which, like Coleridge's in the "Dejection" Ode, has become vacant:

> They are more than leaves that cover the barren
> rock
>
> They bud the whitest eye, the pallidest sprout,
> New senses in the engenderings of sense. . . .

"They bud the whitest eye. . . . They bloom as a man loves." The word and the man are united by the organic metaphors, and the potentialities of life and language are guarded, meanings "Of such mixed motion and such imagery / That its barreness becomes a thousand things." The mixing of motion and imagery -- re-metaphorizing metaphor -- is the key to the rock's strength. In a phrase from another late poem, "the growth of life within life" (OP 92), the idea of life itself works both as tenor and vehicle of metaphor; the meaning of "life" is extended by the growth. And the rock of the central late poem is both "night and that which night illumines": night as reality, and night as the source of poetry, releasing its "midnight-minted fragrances."

The concern for the organicity of metaphor, its engendering power, is reminiscent in many ways of the late Yeats. It enables the poet to continue, and to avoid an extremity of solipsism. Because there is an introjection of the world, the corpus will not be a dry skeleton. As Stevens argued in his great self-celebration "The Planet on the Table," it was only important that his works bear "Some affluence, if only half-perceived, / In the poverty of their words, / Of the planet of which they were part" (CP 533). The poet allies with nature, and would even <u>be</u> nature. As he wrote in 1953, glossing "The Man With the Blue Guitar," XIX, "I want to be nature in the form of a man, with all the resources of nature" (L 790). He even, in the same passage, calls nature his parent (as well as a monster), a Wordsworthian formula celebrated in the 1950 "The Irish Cliffs of Moher" (CP 501-12) with its elemental deities the "race of fathers: earth / And sea and air." Such an alliance of forces is often expressed in terms of "halves." In "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (CP 496-7) the angel of reality is a "figure half seen," amidst "meanings said / By repetitions of half-meanings": it requires the mind to complete itself, just as the mind requires it to renew itself. In "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," "The sun is half the world, half everything, / The bodiless half," the sun here being the symbol of the imagination's power. The "other half" is the darkness of negation and deconstruction (CP 481-82). Stevens' late work cannot be considered without reference to either of these powers: the potential decomposition of everything that the poet writes, and his ability to describe in his metaphorical profusion "the growth of life within life."

4.3.2 Last Things

In the final section of this chapter, I will examine a number of Stevens' last poems in terms of the vocabulary of "final gestures" and endings which was developed in chapter I. If he was willing to place a special value on the last thoughts of writers like Planck and Santayana, then we might well expect him to do the same in his own last works, providing some suggestion of closure, engagement with posterity, or account of the nature of death itself. Some of these possibilities have already been discussed: "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" is an allegory of death (though hardly Stevens' last word on it, as some writers have implied[1]); "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" deals also with the moment of death, but combines the three allegorical perspectives of the earlier poem in the figure of Santayana, with his achieved perfection of thought which is, I argued, essentially retrospective in its construction. But in his late poetry there are a number of poems which are more personal and direct than these two poems in their treatment of "last things."

Stevens' attitude to formal closure was equivocal, and is illustrated by the fact that "The Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," was suggested to him as an end-piece by Marianne Moore and thus ended up in place as a result of a chance meeting (L 733-34). He was willing to alter the ending of individual poems, reversing the last stanzas of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," for example, in the final version (and as a result giving the poem a less strong ending).[2] In general, it has been argued that Stevens did not favour normal closure

1. See, for example, Libby, p. 66; and Robert Buttel, "Knowledge on the Edges of Oblivion: Stevens' Later Poems," WSJ, 5 (1981), 11-16.
2. See Bloom, Wallace Stevens, pp. 334-37.

in his work.[1] His poems are discursive and open-ended, often collections of meditations rather than unified wholes. His dialectic, too, is non-Hegelian; there is no "synthesis" of viewpoints.[2] Nevertheless there are a number of poems in which he considers his career as a whole, even if they are not so carefully tailored and placed as Hardy or Yeats's "last" poems. Most are discussed elsewhere in this chapter, but their various aims can be enumerated here. "Conversation with Three Women of New England" sets out three "modes" of poetry and attempts to provide a perspective on them. Various poems sound the last note on a particular theme recurrent in Stevens' work: "Farewell without a Guitar" is obvious enough, "The Course of a Particular" finally clears up the matter of what he calls "the fiction of the leaves," "St. Armourer's Church" is a final look at architecture; all of them written in a way which shows a consciousness of endings (rather than an attempt at what could more strictly be defined as closure). In "A Clear Day and No Memories" the weather is finally cast off (and memory with it), in "A Quiet Normal Life" and "The Final Soliloquy" he sees the source of his vision most clearly, and in "The Planet on the Table" he affirms that "Ariel was glad he had written his poems" (CP 532), adding that their survival is less important than their "affluence" -- a final repetition of his idea that he wrote out of his own "poverty" rather than a desire for fame, and thus also a suggestion that he was realizing the intellectual capital of a

1. An exception is Gerald B. Crisp, "Revolvings in Crystal: A Study of Closure in some of the Longer Poems of Wallace Stevens," Diss. University of Nebraska, 1979. Crisp's method, borrowing from Barbara Smith, is to analyse the repetition of certain "key phrases" as indicators of closure; he concludes that the later poems do close quite firmly. Such a method seems inappropriate to Stevens, who often works by transforming his central figures; and in any case, Crisp looks only at the longer poems. See also Doggett, The Making of the Poem, pp. 134-35, for a number of useful comments on Stevens and closure.
2. Though in an exchange with Robert Pack in late 1954 he insisted "I do at least arrive at the end of my logic" (L 861).

lifetime. All these poems create meaning through their relationship with earlier works. They can be read as retrospective.

Stevens was also, at the same time, looking towards posterity. I have suggested that poems like "Two Illustrations" contain references to the literary corpus as it will survive the poet. But it is remarkable how few of Stevens' poems could be said to be prospective in their stance, looking directly towards a future audience. Instead, he tends to develop his sense of his own "position" indirectly. In his theoretical writings, in particular, he "places" himself among his contemporaries -- suggesting his affinities with Valéry, and differences from Williams, for example. His relationship with tradition is this late period shows changes. Stevens had always maintained the fiction that he worked without influences, but in the rather unsuccessful 1945 occasional piece "Recitation after Dinner" he attempted to write "A poem about tradition" (OP 86). Tradition is not, he argues, "The bronze of the wise man seated in repose." Rather, it is like Aeneas bearing his father on his back from the ruins of Troy, a bond of love. Stevens did not include this poem in the Collected Poems, but he continued to meditate on tradition and continuity in poetry.[1] In one extraordinary poem, "Long and Sluggish Lines," he seems almost to be the tradition, aged and aware of repetition:

> It makes so little difference, at so much more
> Than seventy, here one looks, one has been here before.
> Wood-smoke rises through trees, is caught in an upper flow
> Of air and whirled away. But it has often been so. (CP 522)

Who has been here? There is no description of wood-smoke in Stevens' work before this, though there is in Wordsworth ("Tintern Abbey") and in

1. David La Guardia, in Advance on Chaos: The Sanctifying Imagination of Wallace Stevens (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 156-59, usefully links Stevens' genealogical research to a concern for tradition in his poetry.

the work of so many of the New England "journalists." The poem uses images of weariness and repetition to suggest an imaginative agedness. The "enraged" landscape is almost reminiscent of the antipathetic imagery of Browning's "Childe Roland." The diction also suggests Browning: "What opposite? Could it be that yellow patch, the side / Of a house, that makes one think the house is laughing . . . ?" But the hints of spring which the mind sees ("Babyishness of forsythia" etc.) are premature; the poet is still incubating in winter:

> ... Wanderer, this is the pre-history of February.
> The life of the poem in the mind has not yet begun,
>
> You were not born yet when the trees were crystal
> Nor are you now, in this wakefulness inside a sleep.

The "pre-history of February" recalls all those poems in which Thoreau, Emerson, Whittier and others described the New England snowscape. The "crystal" trees occur nowhere in Stevens, yet they are exactly described in William Cullen Bryant's "A Winter Piece"; a whole grotto of them.[1] In these last four lines Stevens seems to shy away from the potentially catastrophic realization of his own repetitiveness which Browning's poem sees. Instead, he produces a classic winter-piece. The poet meditates inwardly on tradition, and sees himself as about to be born into it -- through death. "The life of the poem in the mind" is a tantalizingly ambiguous phrase, suggesting that "Stevens" will only exist after his death, but also that he stands at the beginning of a tradition yet to be realized, perhaps the tradition of his own readership.

"Long and Sluggish Lines" thus invokes a winter mood in which the poet half-sleeps, and expects a new life within a tradition. A concern

1. In a comment wonderfully suggestive of Harold Bloom 's claim that the late career sees a projection of the poet into an anteriority in which he engenders his precursors, Stevens wrote the next year that "just to think of things as they were twenty-five years ago makes one feel like William Cullen Bryant's great, great grandfather, to use an expression that someone else used not long ago" (L 767).

for tradition can even be seen in poems which, like "The World as Meditation," offer a dialectical rejoinder to the poetry of winter, and a reassertion of the poet-as-voyager:

> Is it Ulysses that approaches from the east,
> The interminable adventurer? The trees are mended,
> That winter is washed away. Someone is moving
>
> On the horizon and lifting himself above it. (CP 520)

The hero Ulysses is a figure for Penelope's desire (most commentators identify Stevens with Penelope). His "savage presence" is a continued renewal. But there is a sense of tradition in this poem, including Stevens' and other poems on Ulysses, and the tradition of poems on meditation which is signalled by the epigraph from Georges Enesco. In such a context, Penelope's fidelity resembles Wordsworth's sister Dorothy's trust as it is invoked in "Tintern Abbey"; a guarantee that the poet will not be abandoned by his muse and the earth: here "Friend and dear friend and a planet's encouragement" (CP 521). Such a phrase shares its sentiment with an elegiac tradition (it could be applied precisely to Collins's ode on Thomson), though here it is the creatures of his own mind that Stevens eulogises, measuring his own inwardness. The topic of "voyaging" metamorphises into introspection and an engagement with tradition.

Two years later, in 1954, Stevens took up the Ulysses theme again in order to write "The Sail of Ulysses." His most directly testamentary poem, it is a poetic "will" comparable to Yeats's "Under Ben Bulben" -- though the fact that he suppressed it after reading it at Columbia suggests Stevens' difficulty with such a procedure, and it received the ambiguous status of Donne's poems, neither burned nor published in his lifetime. Nevertheless it is more than what Samuel Morse calls an

"occasional poem" (OP xxiii), constituting a remarkable summary of many of the ideas dominating Stevens' poetry from 1948. The poem is a long soliloquy in direct speech, made by the mariner Ulysses. He opens with a series of syllogisms proving that "knowledge is the only life" (OP 100). The poem's eight sections then move through a number of familiar categories: in section II "the inner direction on which we depend"; in section III the opposed ideas of the poet as monument and the poet as lamp; in sections IV and V the prophecy of a new order in which man is freed from myth ("We shall have gone beyond the symbols / To that which they symbolized"). Section VI deals with the genealogy of knowledge more explicitly than any other of Stevens' poems:

> In the generations of thought, man's sons
> And heirs are the powers of the mind,
> His only testament and estate.
> He has nothing but the truth to leave. (OP 103)

After this effusion, section VII returns to the place of the particular within the abstract, and the idea of a consummation in the limit:

> As if abstractions were, themselves
> Particulars of a relative sublime.
> This is not poet's ease of mind.
> It is the fate that dwells in truth.
> We obey the coaxings of our end.

The final section of "The Sail of Ulysses" is perhaps the most interesting, evoking a sibyl who is like the figure at the end of "The Owl in the Sarcophagus": "A summing up of the loftiest lives / And their directing sceptre, the crown / And final effulgence. . . ." This time she is "Not, / For a change, the englistered woman" of the earlier poem, but "a blind thing fumbling for its form, / . . . A child asleep in its own life." She is that which the human mind can make of death and non-being, "An inhuman of our features." She is thus a figure for ending, but here stripped of all symbolic apparatus. She is not the "gorgeous symbol,"

but instead related to "The self as sibyl," to the "need" within each person to attempt to know her.

"The Sail of Ulysses," amidst all its testamentary rhetoric, also contains a gesture which signals the arrival of death, or a meditation on death, within the poem, in a way which immediately suggests the poet's composing himself to encounter it -- and a move from the prospective and testamentary to a new sense of immediacy. The use of ideas of gesture is quite common in Stevens' work. As Frank Doggett points out, he often uses the image of "a hand presented for display."[1] A mysterious poem of 1942, "The Hand as a Being," depicts the detached hand of the muse composing and embracing the ephebe (CP 271). In later poems like "The Novel" the hand is a figure for the mind's detached attention, exposed to the cold. But elsewhere it is linked more directly to the presence and desire of the poet, as it is in Keats. Thus in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" there is "the rock of autumn,"

> The weight we lift with the finger of a dream,
>
> The heaviness we lighten by light will,
> By the hand of desire, faint, sensitive, the soft
> Touch and trouble of the touch of the actual hand. (CP 476)

As in "The Owl in the Sarchophagus," the hand is described in terms of a series of tautologies -- light with light will, touch of a touch -- mirror-like constructions suggesting the self-enclosure of language. The hand as object then suddenly arrives. In "The Sail of Ulysses" there is a hand which, once again, signals a late revelation of the poet's presence within the poem, though within a complex series of images. In section II of the poem there is a hand, "The luminous companion, the hand, / The fortifying arm" which is the poet's solipsistic strength in

1. Doggett, The Making of the Poem, pp. 82-83. Curiously, Doggett suggests that such figures are present only up to The Auroras. That is not the case.

"human loneliness." In section III there appears "the true creator, the waver / Waving purpling bands, the thinker / Thinking golden thoughts in a golden mind" (OP 100). This is the familiar figure of the poet-magician performing his appointed mysteries, fabricating monuments and creating "from nothingness / Such black constructions, such public shapes / And murky masonry." All this dubious carved darkness or space is suddenly dismissed:

> one wonders
> At the finger that brushes this aside
> Gigantic in everything but size.

The gesture dismisses at a blow the poet as architect, so that Stevens may move on to an even more ambitious topic ("The beginning of a final order"), and the testamentary part of the poem, in which the poet speaks directly to his audience.

In a number of late poems Stevens assigns the gesture to a sibyl-like figure which is reminiscent of those incarnations of death as a mother in romantic poetry. The third allegorical figure in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" is, as I have suggested, related to death itself, described in paradoxical terms which invoke the reflexivity of language. She is the apotheosis of the present moment (or the march of time), "tall in self not symbol, quick / And potent" -- the moment here being the moment of death, where "what was has ceased to be what is" (CP 435).[1] We are told that "She spoke with backward gestures of her hand" -- with gestures which are reflexive, enclosing; but at the section's end she makes a final gesture which emerges nakedly from her garments, a gesture towards silence and nothingness:

1. See Berger, pp. 125-28, for an analysis of this figure similar in some respects to mine. Berger sees her as representing something more akin to a muse: the relationship does not seem so intimate.

> O exhal^ation, O fling without a sleeve
> And motion outward, reddened and resolved
> From sight, in the silence that follows her last word --

This is, perhaps, as close as the poet can get to death; though as I have suggested, the figures in this poem (as the recoil which follows these lines argues) are a "mythology" rather than a personal approach to death.

In another of Stevens' very late poems, there is a gesture which is similarly incarnated in an allegorical figure, a sibyl. "Note on Moonlight" concerns itself with the distinction between an "object the less" and an "object the more." The former is the Romantic mountain, "expanded and elevated almost / Into a sense" (CP 531) -- humanized nature. The "object the more" is not a natural object, but rather a presence, an "indeterminate form," a "gesture in the dark," and a Sphinx-like "figure waiting in the road." It is the deity of gestures, "active with a power, an inherent life" which spins meanings from the void. From an encounter with the uncanny within "arbours of Saturn-star" comes a meaning which is self-sufficient, a final epiphany:

> The one moonlight, the various universe, intended
> So much just to be seen -- a purpose, empty
> Perhaps, absurd perhaps, but at least a purpose,
> Certain and ever more fresh. Ah! Certain, for
> sure . . . (CP 532)

And thus the poem ends, with three periods almost unique in Stevens, which seem themselves to be like a gesture towards the void. Affirmation is possible at the edges of oblivion.

In contrast to these gestures towards death, or a final revelation, there is the grand retrospective gesture of one of Stevens' very last poems, "As You Leave the Room." It is the poem in which he most directly summarizes his career, but the division of voice within it itself suggests a withdrawal -- the poet addressing himself from outside his

career, and then speaking from within it, as the man who is "leaving":

> <u>You speak</u>. <u>You say</u>: Today's character is not
> A skeleton out of its cabinet. Nor am I.
>
> That poem about the pineapple, the one
> About the mind as never satisfied.
>
> The one about the credible hero, the one
> About summer, are not what skeletons think about.
>
> I wonder, have I lived a skeleton's life,
> As a disbeliever in reality,
>
> A countryman of all the bones in the world?
> Here, now, the snow I had forgotten becomes
>
> Part of a major reality, part of
> An appreciation of a reality
>
> And thus an elevation, as if I left
> With something I could touch, touch every way.
>
> And yet nothing has been changed except what is
> Unreal, as if nothing had been changed at all. (OP 116-17)

The persistent questioning of his poems which he undertakes culminates in the "Here, now" of a point of realization (though also of departure and, implicitly, death). "Snow" in Stevens' work usually refers to the coldness of reality. To write of the snow one has forgotten is to say that one has subsisted on that reality and made it human; that one has fleshed out one's skeleton with the flesh of the world. In an earlier draft of the poem dating from perhaps as early as 1947, Stevens had written "warmth" rather than snow. The reversal suggests that he is no longer referring to the metaphorical effusiveness of Florida and that aspect of his early career which he might have "forgotten." Instead, the external world is introjected; it is redeemed, made part of the poet's "appreciation of a reality." The word "appreciation" here retains its commercial overtones, in that the poet has converted its poverty into his own richness -- just as in "The Planet on the Table" the word "affluence"

testifies to a similar triumph over "poverty." This accomplished, the shape of what he has achieved becomes "an elevation," something amenable to touch (at least, within the parentheses of metaphor). As in the great poem on Santayana, the poet's structures are realized, but like Hardy, he achieves this as he "leaves," he takes it with him. It is his satisfaction, his reward. The gesture carefully balances affirmation and monumental solidity with denial and withdrawal, exploiting to the full the simultaneous unreality and presence of the poet -- or his hand -- within his writings. Closure is hardly the issue, since it exists only in the "here, now" of the poem's own time.

"As You Leave the Room" could be said to be a "backward gesture of the hand" (to borrow Stevens' phrase); its orientation is initially retrospective, but turns inward to the dying writer as he vanishes from his works. Stevens' last two poems seem to abandon the retrospective. "A Mythology Reflects its Region" considers the nature of the "image" of the creator within posterity -- he is reborn in it "in a freshened youth," and becomes part of its "substance," though again the claim is qualified by the opening assertion that "Here / In Connecticut, we never lived in a time / When mythology was possible." To die into a region is to come home to it, Stevens had suggested in the short prose piece "Connecticut" (1955) which gave the poem its title: "we live in the tradition which is the true mythology of the region" (OP 295). He concludes "it is a question of coming home to the American self in the sort of place in which it was formed" -- a final declaration of his own place within the New England tradition, and of his ability to see, as Emily Dickinson put it, "New Englandly."

We will never be sure that "Of Mere Being" (OP 117-8) was Stevens'

last poem chronologically. But it is a poem which seems, formally, to close his career, and to deserve its treatment as an end-piece. It does not "sum-up" in the way that "As You Leave the Room" does; nor does it indicate a final state of being, as "A Clear Day and No Memories" does. Instead it points, with all the uncanniness which its readers have noted, <u>beyond</u> the poetry to the abyss, to a final shimmering symbol "on the edge of space" (OP 118):

> The palm at the end of the mind,
> Beyond the last thought, rises
> In the bronze distance. . . .

There is a textual problem surrounding the word "distance," which Holly Stevens has replaced by the alternative reading "decor" in her selection of Stevens' poems. Charles Berger, accepting the latter reading, writes: "Much rides on whether or not 'the end of the mind' and 'Beyond the last thought' are synonymous, or whether Stevens implies that there is a space <u>between</u> the last thought and mind's end, a region that lies within the mind but beyond the range of thought."[1] This seems to me to blur the issue rather than clarify it, since "decor" implies that there is a last <u>scene</u>: a final piece of artifice firmly within the mind's range. The whole poem is rendered rather static. If, on the other hand, the reading "distance" is retained, the poem is both more clear and more dynamic. The palm rises in the distance as something towards which the poet progresses, at the edge of a void. The interval between "the end of the mind" and "the last thought" is measured by that "distance" -- the last poem points across the abyss to death, perhaps to an existence in death.

1. Berger, p. 186. Holly Stevens restores the "typescript" reading, but as only a few critics have pointed out, there is no clear evidence that Stevens himself was not responsible for the change. "Distance" can be related to the "men growing small in the distances of space" of the Santayana elegy, and reinforces the sense of the bird's otherness. "Decor" is, perhaps, consonance with Stevens' love of gaudiness, though this does not seem to fit easily with his late winter mood, and desire to be a "spirit without a foyer."

In this, the poem is itself a gesture like that which I have described in other poems. Something like the same movement is seen in the figure in "The Owl in the Sarcophagus":

> she moved
> With a sad splendor, beyond artifice,
> Impassioned by the knowledge that she had,
> There on the edges of oblivion. (CP 435)

The problem with this figure is that she is too human, too clearly a person of poetry, in contrast to the bird in "The palm at the end of the mind" which sings "without human meaning." Little can meaningfully be said about a bird which is "beyond the last thought." It can be described, but it refuses association with any other symbol, it is sufficient to itself, as the short, chopped sentences with which it is described suggest, eschewing conjunction:

> The bird sings. Its feathers shine.
> The palm stands on the edge of space.
> The wind moves slowly in the branches.
> The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

Every image invoked here has its antecedents in Stevens: bird, feathers or bright plumage, palm, wind; but each seems here to be cast loose, to loose all its associations, so the poem ends rather than summarizes. There is nothing of the palinode or testament about it.

The palm and bird are mysterious symbols. There a number of birds and palms in Stevens' poetry: the invocation of "desire / A palm that rises up beyond the sea" in "Description Without Place" is often suggested, for example, and the bird in "Credences of Summer" (CP 344). But a more useful juxtaposition, in terms of mood rather than the meaning of the symbol, is that with Stevens' early poem "Ploughing on Sunday." These are its opening stanzas:

The white cock's tail
Tosses in the wind.
The turkey-cock's tail
Glitters in the sun.

Water in the fields.
The wind pours down.
The feathers flare
And bluster in the wind. (CP 20)

The vocabulary, imagery, and short, clipped sentence construction all suggest the later poem, as in particular does the uncanny and static quality of the image of the bird. There is also an interesting contrast to be made with the anti-Sabbatarianism of the middle section of the early poem:

Remus, blow your horn!
I'm ploughing on Sunday,
Ploughing North America.
Blow your horn!

Tum-ti-tum,
Ti-tum-tum-tum!
The turkey-cock's tail
Spreads to the sun.

This is the Sunday of the young Stevens: the day of the imagination, of the savage strummings and the harrowing of his poetry. In the late poem there are no horns, no continents to be conquered, and the wind moves gently rather than blustering. In the early poem we are presented with a field of view: a silent panorama in which the only sound is the imposition of the poet's horn; whereas in the later poem it is the bird, the symbol itself, which has broken into a song for the poet, "a foreign song" of another country beyond life. "Of Mere Being" thus provides, in a sense, a space for the poet to die into. It is, to adopt one of Stevens' own figures, a post-card from the limit.

"Of Mere Being" is a self-consciously late poem. It is possible, of course, that Stevens would, like Hardy and Yeats, have written further

"end-pieces" if he had lived longer. We have what appears to be the outline of such a poem in the plan for a poem called "Abecedarium of Finesoldier" which Samuel Morse reproduces. The plan provides an evocative sense of a dialogue with heroic death, and of the poet's role in posterity: "I am bound by the will of other men," "Invisible fate becomes visible," "The narrative stops . . . Good-bye to the narration," "As great as a javelin, as futile as old," "But did he have any value as a person" (OP xxiv -- these are the draft opening lines of sections I, IV, VIII, IX, X of a projected eleven part poem: appropriately, the final part is missing). The outline itself suggests a number of the topics of poetic endings: the poet's acceptance of his place in tradition, fixed by the wills of "other men" and monumentalized; the moment of death itself ("The narrative stops . . ."); perhaps a doubt about the role of the poet as mythology or a "javelin" cast at futurity; and finally an assessment or defense of the "person" or human self. The unfinished and fragmentary nature of the plan itself raises all the old questions about where the poet ends, and our interpretation of him begins. Like so many of Stevens' late works, it has the poet's death as part of its fabric: indeed, an Opus Posthumous.

Conclusion

In formal debate, it is not usual to introduce new material in a conclusion. As I have argued, that is not the case for writers in their final periods: Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens all produce new material, sometimes from the decay of old, or from the prospect of a life beyond the confines of physical existence, a product of death itself. Old age is for all these poets a voyage of discovery, often forcing them to revise their preconceptions about it and to seek new models for their behaviour, and to confront the necessity to define and understand their own late periods. I argued that in each case we can see a structural adjustment in their late career, often prepared by a work or works which "placed" the poet and consolidated his position: Hardy's "General Introduction" and, particularly, his autobiography, Yeats's A Vision (1925), and Stevens' essays of 1949 and 1951. What I called in Hardy's case an "accepted subjectivity" is, in various forms, an important outcome of this change -- in Hardy's work part of his growing confidence in his second career, in Yeats's a function of his desire for a realized wisdom, and in Stevens' partly an attempt to reconcile his "two careers." Following these works, there is a consciously "late" period which is more fragmentary and often informed by ideas of decay or tiredness. Hardy's very late period is radically subjective; Yeats qualifies his desire for an achieved public wisdom; Stevens characterizations of the role of the old poet tend towards an emphasis on private satisfaction. The writer in old age tends to a dualism which is partly a product of the way in which old age is perceived: all of the poets studied have two very different pictures of old age, as wisdom or decline.

The nature of the late period so produced is, of course, dependent on the individuality of the poet. In Hardy, we saw a writer who leads a ghost-haunted afterlife among the dead, in which he is constantly exceeding his own expectations. For Yeats, the need to keep writing produces an emphasis on sexuality and incarnation, even self-insemination; while in Stevens' work the debate about topics like "architecture" and the poetic corpus are informed by the idea of the "ending." This, in fact, is the case for all these poets. The prospect of the end of their careers produces a number of effects: Hardy's anxiety about posterity; Yeats's purgation of his poetic persona and his considerations of the fate of the corpus after death; and Stephens' introjection of both the powers of decay and the fecundity of nature within his discourse. Change itself becomes an issue: Hardy waits for "my change" in one late poem, Yeats asserts that "the soul knows its changes of state alone," and Stevens "measures the velocities of change." The rejection of previous work often produces fresh material within the late period which can be what Whitman called his "supplement days," a series of marginal annotations to the book of the self rather than a full poetic presence. But old writers <u>are</u> soon to become books, and in all the poets studied here, there is in their late period a heightened awareness of the division of the "two bodies" of the writer, between text and the writing hand which represents individual experience. Old poets do not assert their physicality in the way which young poets do: Whitman, for example, moves from the confidence of his early "final" poem "So Long" to the repetition and stutterings of his final texts, and the suggestion in "Good-bye my Fancy", that he will take his "true songs" with him, beyond life. A clear line is drawn between

the writer and the texts in the last poems of Hardy, whose final period is, I suggested, structured by the need to enforce that division; of Yeats, who writes his own epitaph and purges himself of his literary corpus; and of Stevens, who pictures the corpus as a garment which the hand of the poet brushes aside. Each of these poets provides a series of "final gestures" which become more and more private, retrospective and immediate rather than public, as the author seeks to provide an image for his own death and departure. Last poems are not static icons, they are more like the funeral procession itself, and the poet's hand is the first to throw a handful of earth on the grave.

Appendix 1 : A Note on Dating

This study, which is partly chronological in its consideration of the literary careers of the writers it deals with, has depended on the efforts of numerous scholars who have worked on the dating of the poems of Hardy, Yeats, and Stevens. In the case of Hardy's poems, the problems involved are particularly acute. He did date a proportion of his poems, and I have made use of those datings (a convenient list is supplied by Samuel Hynes as appendix E of The Complete Poetical Works, Vol. III). Other poems can be dated by linkage to events in Hardy's life, and I have accepted the suggestions of a number of scholars -- though with some caution, since we know that Hardy's ability to nurture memories over long periods of time means that such connections must be made very cautiously. Nevertheless, poems like "Snow in the Suburbs" can be linked to particular periods in his life, even if, as was usually the case, he revised an early draft of the poem for later publication. In a few cases, poems can be dated by reference to Hardy's letters, or linked to entries in notebooks, or annotations in his Bible or other texts, and perhaps referred to his pattern of reading. We have good reason to believe, for example, that he read Sophocles in the 1890s, and composed his loose translation of the Oedipus Coloneus chorus then. In the majority of other cases, we have at best a terminus ad quem, either periodical or volume publication. I have usually referred to the date of poems where it is known or can be suggested, and otherwise specified its volume of origin.

In the case of Yeats, the problems are much less severe. He usually dated his manuscripts, and we often have a clear indication of the

provenance of not only the completed poem, but also successive drafts of it. Where no dating is available, other evidence has often been adduced: references in his letters (in which he often quotes from work in progress), the position of manuscripts alongside other papers, biographical references, and so on. I have used the datings suggested by a number of scholars, particularly Richard Ellmann, A. Norman Jeffares, David R. Clark, Curtis Bradford, and Richard J. Finneran. Jeffares's New Commentary is inevitably the first port of call in the search for the dating of any Yeats poem, collating the findings of many separate works.

In the case of Wallace Stevens, the difficulty is that few drafts of his poems survive. I have for the most part followed the datings of poems provided by Samuel French Morse in Opus Posthumous, and by Holly Stevens in The Palm at the End of the Mind. Both writers base their datings on a combination of manuscript (i.e typescript) evidence, correspondence, and date of publication (the latter information is supplied by J.M. Edelstein in his Wallace Stevens: A Descriptive Bibliography [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973]). In some cases, it is possible to use the evidence supplied by Stevens' habits of publication to make intelligent guesses concerning composition. In later life he was, for example, faced with numerous requests for poems from editors, and thus would often write to them with information about what work he had in hand; or would, if the commitment was longstanding, eventually send them a poem which one can usually assume was written close to the date at which it was dispatched. Such reasoning would place "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," for example, in early 1952, after a year in which Stevens had turned down a number of requests for poems.

Appendix 2 : Problems of Order and Intention in Yeats's Work

In this appendix, I discuss two problems related to the order of Yeats's poetic oeuvre. The first of these is the question which Phillip Marcus raises about what has come to be the accepted ordering of Yeats's final volume of poetry: the Last Poems which he never gave that title. Secondly, I comment briefly on the controversy surrounding the most recent edition of Yeats's poems, edited by Richard J. Finneran.

(a) The Ordering of Yeats's Last Poems

In his recent The Poems of W.B. Yeats: A New Edition, Richard J. Finneran restores the ordering of Yeats's final volume of poetry to the order provided by Yeats's manuscript table of contents, first published by Curtis Bradford -- also the ordering of the Cuala Press Last Poems and Two Plays (1939).[1] This ordering has been used in a number of subsequent discussions of Yeats's final period, and has, within the critical community, become more or less canonical. Despite the hostility many reviewers expressed towards Finneran's editing of the new edition, most concurred in his decision to follow Bradford. However, in an article forthcoming in the Yeats Annual, No. 5, Phillip Marcus sets out to disturb this consensus.[2] Marcus's argument proceeds along a number of lines. Firstly, he argues that Yeats's original plan can only be considered in the context of the Cuala Press volume, which includes two plays. He points out that "Yeats left extra space between the last poem listed and the plays, but his consecutive numbering suggests an inclusive

1. See pp.
2. Phillip Marcus, "Yeats's 'Last Poems': A Reconsideration." I am grateful to the editor of the Yeats Annual, Warwick Gould, for allowing me to see this essay.

series. . . . the plays were not merely tacked on at the end but constituted an integral part of the overall design of the volume."[1] Juxtaposing the final poem of the volume, "Politics," with The Death of Cuchulain and Purgatory, Marcus argues that the plays constitute "a critique of Yeats's own stance in 'Politics,'" in that the plays move from the personal cry of the poem to more public concerns.[2] The old man of The Death of Cuchulain, he suggests, presents a view of the world both political and private; and the portrayal of love in the play is more complex than the cry for lost opportunities in "Politics."

Marcus's second main point is that Yeats "clearly wanted" to end the volume with the "grand-scale pyrotechnics of two of his most powerful plays."[3] He then argues that "Under Ben Bulben" is a suitable replacement for the two plays in the context of a Collected Poems, since it "embodies many of the themes and images prominent also in one or both of the plays."[4] A number of passages from the poem and the plays are compared in support of this assertion. Finally, Marcus undertakes a brief survey of Yeats's practice in reordering his volumes from publication to publication, before concluding that Yeats might well have re-ordered this volume to provide a strong ending similar to that provided by the plays. At the same time, he admits that there is no way of proving this to be the case, simply concluding that the alterations to the ordering of the final volume devised by Thomas Mark and Mrs. Yeats may well be very close to the alterations which Yeats might himself have made for the Macmillan edition, and that a courageous future editor might well reject Bradford's thesis, including the critical arguments based on it.[5]

1. I quote from the typescript, p. 6.
2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Ibid., pp. 12-13.
5. Ibid., p. 19

I have summarized, I hope accurately, an argument which is part textual, part interpretive. Indeed, it is the elision of the demarcation between these two areas which, I would suggest, enables Marcus to sustain his argument. I will deal with it point by point. Firstly, on the holograph list, Marcus refers to "an inclusive series" which renders irrelevant the gap (which he reproduces in his text) between the poems and the plays. But an "inclusive series" is the way that anyone would indicate an ordering within a volume: it does not therefore imply that items 20 and 21, the plays, are part of a designed sequence: indeed, the gap would suggest otherwise. Even at this point, the distinction between the textual problem and interpretation is blurred. Secondly, in his actual treatment of the relationship between "Politics" and the two plays, there are a number of problems. The first is simply his interpretation of the poem. Marcus reads it as a poem which is primarily a rejection of politics and public discourse -- an interpretation which leads to see Yeats as using the plays to refute Archibald MacLeish's contention "that he could not use his 'public' language to deal with political subjects."[1] As I read "Politics," it is not about politics about all, but about the individual's purgation of his or her unspent passion -- an aspect of "purgation" which, I argued earlier, became particularly important in his late work. Marcus quotes a letter to Dorothy Wellesley in which Yeats grumbles about MacLeish. But he does not quote the letter of 1932 in which Yeats wrote: "I shall be a sinful man to the end, and think upon my death-bed of all the nights I wasted in my youth" (L 790) -- a statement which precisely anticipates the rhetoric of "Politics." In support of this emphasis on the private nature of the poem, it is possible to point out that Yeats's previous volume, the New Poems of 1938, also ends with an emphasis on the individual's sense of

1. Ibid., p. 11.

his unwillingness to fulfill a public role. As I argued earlier, Yeats often orders his volumes so as to produce a movement away from the public and monumental to the personal and psychological.

A more general objection concerns Marcus's use of the plays. While what he says about them is accurate in terms of content (as one would expect from the editor of one of them), he skews our perception of them by considering them only in terms of his interpretation of "Politics" and the Yeats/MacLeish debate. In so doing he ignores what is surely the proper context of these plays: the run of Yeats's plays in a projected Collected Plays, with The Death of Cuchulain as the final comment on his heroic cycle, and Purgatory the last of a series of plays on spiritual subjects (though, of course, it also has historical overtones). There are, understandably, "significant resonances" between the play and the final poem, but as Marcus himself points out, we might expect such "resonance" within any group of Yeats's late works (it is interesting that he is willing to use this as an argument against Bradford's ordering, while using the same values in building his own case).[1] But to contrast, for example, the treatment of love in "Politics" with the complexities of the plays, with their several characters, is to produce a completely imbalanced argument. Moreover, Marcus usually insists on having it both ways in comparing the poem and the plays: on the one hand he sees similarities; but on the other hand he detects "ironic" contrasts (between, for example, the old men of "Politics" and of The Death of Cuchulain). On more specific points, there are also things to disagree with. For example, Marcus argues that the fact that the mother in Purgatory represents the Anglo-Irish order and its decline necessarily "constitutes a literal exemplification of Mann's dictum [in the epigraph

1. Ibid., p. 18

to 'Politics'] that 'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.'"[1] One could equally argue the opposite: that the play's action proves that politics can only be discussed in terms of the individual's purgative processes; and thus say that instead of refuting "Politics" Yeats is reinforcing the poem's message. Similarly, in The Death of Cuchulain the play's action confirms that the modern age is debased, and that there is no public sculptural languages in which heroism can be expressed (that is the point of Yeats's denigration of Sheppard's "bad statue"). Marcus later claims that "Under Ben Bulben" resembles The Death of Cuchulain in that offers hope "that Irish artists will bring the future into line with the greatness of the past."[2] But this seems to me precisely what The Death of Cuchulain does not do: quite the opposite, it offers little hope. Slightly later, Marcus argues that "Under Ben Bulben" and Purgatory are similar in that both end with epitaphs or prayers for the dead. They are, in fact, very different in their endings: the final calm of "Under Ben Bulben" stands in sharp contrast to the confused plea of the play. Marcus partially admits this, contrasting the horseman of the poem with the apocalyptic hoof-beats in the play: again having it both ways, and arguing that contrast rather than similarity is grounds for arguing that one element in the arrangement can replace another. It is also worth pointing out, while discussing Marcus's linking of the plays with the volume as a whole, that he does not "place" "Cuchulain Comforted" in his argument, as logically he should.

The third general area in which I disagree with Marcus is his consideration of what might have happened had Yeats lived to reorder the Cuala Press volume in a different context, separate from the plays.

1. Ibid, p. 11.
2. Ibid, p. 14.

Here, Marcus is, I think, most seriously wrong. Firstly, he begins to introduce the idea that "Under Ben Bulben" might replace the plays before he has raised the problem of ordering, in a passage which ends:

> Reading backwards from the end of Last Poems and Two Plays to the beginning, we realize that the composure permeating "In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid" represents a brave defiance of darkness and near-despair. In addition to providing the effect of a grand finale to the collection considered as a linear sequence, the plays, like "Under Ben Bulben," counterpoint against that linearity a cyclical pattern pervading both the individual human life and the larger movements of history itself.[1]

There are a number of things wrong with this. The idea that a grand finale is needed is never questioned; the idea that the collection as "a linear sequence" can be contrasted with the cycles of history is surely wrong: what else can a group of poems compose but a sequence? They can, of course, describe a lifecycle, but Marcus does not consider whether that is the case.

In actually examining Yeats's reorderings, Marcus looks only at a few volumes in which Yeats removed plays. He admits that in some cases plays are removed without any arrangement; and the last example which he considers is The Wild Swans at Coole (1917, 1919), in which Yeats added to the Cuala Press printing in the Macmillan edition. This seems curious, since Yeats's most extensively reordered volume comes after 1919. The Tower was first published by Macmillan, and remained relatively intact; but the Macmillan volume following it, The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933) was an amalgam of poems published in The Winding Stair (New York: Fountain Press, 1929) and Words for Music Perhaps (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1932), as well as a few additions.[2] The volume opens with the first five poems of the 1929 volume, in order. It ends with the remainder of the 1929 volume, the sequence "A Woman Young

1. Ibid., p. 15.
2. See Allan Wade, A Bibliography of the Writings of W.B. Yeats, 3rd ed., rev. by Russell K. Alspach (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968), entries 164, 168, 169.

and Old." In between these are the poems from Words for Music Perhaps. If we number them from 1 to 23 in the original order, then Yeats reordered them in the Macmillan edition as follows: 9, 10, 14, 13, 15, 16, 12, 17, 4, 5, 6, 11, 7, "The Choice" (originally part of 5), 8, 1, 3, 2, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 (this last item, the sequence "Words for Music Perhaps," was itself slightly rearranged). It is extremely difficult to interpret such a rearrangement. Obviously, Yeats felt the sequences belonged at the end, but the changes in ordering he made to the poems from Words to Music Perhaps are much more difficult, and one can only hope to tentatively suggest some of the principles behind them. The opening three poems, for example, were shifted to a point much later in the volume, perhaps partly because an alternative group of ambitious philosophical poems was provided by the five poems from The Winding Stair (1929). But those five include "Oil and Blood," a poem which dwells upon the breakdown of order, and Yeats seems to have been prompted to link it to poems like "Veronica's Napkin" and "Spilt Milk," which are also shorter and tend to deal with the power of history to infect individual lives -- a theme which leads in turn to the meditations on Yeats's personal experience in the Coole Park poems, and finally to the topic of death. "At Algeciras -- A Meditation upon Death" stands at the centre of the volume's main section; "The Choice" seems to begin a movement away from the "life" to fresh thought which is, in part, the result of a rejection of stability which is detectable in the grand philosophical poems which had begun the earlier volume: "Byzantium," "Vacillation." The main grouping ends with an upbeat note, with three short poems expressing reconciliation and sporadic happiness (the same poems which had ended the earlier volume). "Sun and Stream at Glendalough" is, like "Politics," relatively slight, even though it ended one of the volumes. In the final Macmillan ordering, it is followed by the two sequences, but

again, the last of these ends with a personal cry for the individual in history, not unlike that in Purgatory -- hardly Marcus's "big bang." The point is partly that Marcus's assumption that volumes should (and do) end strongly is questionable; it is also that he does not consider enough of Yeats's corpus to support his argument. One could go on, and refer to A Full Moon in March (London: Macmillan, 1935), which includes poems and plays, but in the opposite order to Last Poems and Two Plays, the plays preceding the poems -- how significant is that? In fact, Yeats seems often to have simply lumped his plays in with his poems, with little concern for their exact juxtaposition, and with the idea of tidying up at a later stage.

Marcus demonstrates his own uncertainty about what an ending should comprise when he moves on to the Last Poems. He is insistent that the plays provide a "big bang" ending (what audience feels that of the end of "Purgatory?"), and insists that -- all precedents aside -- the Last Poems would present a "special case" in which Yeats might have wished to end with the testament. Curiously, he then half-withdraws the statement, suggesting that the volume was not intended to be "final." But this is again an imposed preconception. Yeats had written a "testament" in The Tower (not placed at the end), and he believed that death was not a final full stop, but the beginnings of a process, so there are good interpretive arguments against the idea that he would see a volume that would be his last as absolutely different. On the question of the "design" of Yeats's Last Poems, Marcus has a few useful comments to make, but again there is a certain circularity in his argument. He suggests, for example, that "The Gyres" makes a suitably formal replacement for "Under Ben Bulben" at the start of the sequence. But if this is so, then Marcus must admit that, in the original scheme, the apposite place for "Under Ben Bulben" was the beginning of the sequence. Having assumed

that the ordering including the two plays is the correct benchmark, he simply proceeds to juggle the volume around in a way which reflects that ordering, never having properly considered the importance of the original ordering, apart from its last three elements. Moreover, he never really addresses the question of why the Cuala Press New Poems (1938) and Last Poem and Two Plays should, following Mrs. Yeats and Marks, be combined under one title: no clear evidence that Yeats contemplated this has yet been provided.

Marcus concludes that Last Poems and Two Plays "has no more authorial support as a paradigm for a collected edition than does the radical rearrangement used in the posthumous Macmillan volumes."[1] I would argue that it does, in that it was carefully designed by Yeats, and because Marcus's overall argument seems to me to be flawed. His objection to "Politics" as a final poem rests on an overly narrow interpretation of that poem, and a slanted linkage of it with the plays, as well as an incomplete consideration of the run of Yeats's "endings." His rearrangement of the Last Poems is similarly conjectural and rests on an argument which is often circular: having argued that the two plays should be regarded as intrinsic to the ending of Last Poems and Two Plays because they "resonate" with "Politics," he substitutes "Under Ben Bulben" for them on the basis of "design," never having considered the relevance of the original design. Finally, I would add that on the nature of "Under Ben Bulben" itself, Marcus seems to me to be wrong. As I argued in my chapter on Yeats, the poem sees a movement from the monumental and testamentary to a more troubled stance, and finally something like auto-elegy as Yeats describes his own departure. I described it as prefiguring the movement of the volume as a whole; and

1. Marcus, "Yeats's Last Poems," p. 17.

perhaps it could end the volume. But the case which Marcus makes for the ordering of Marks and Mrs. Yeats seems to be insufficiently strong to justify the editor of a Collected Poems retaining it -- unless, of course, we are willing to have the motivated accidents of literary history to be incorporated into any text.

(B) The Ordering of Yeats's Corpus

The question of the wholeness or completeness of Yeats's final works has some bearing on the recent fierce controversy over the ordering of Yeats's corpus which has been provoked by Richard J. Finneran's editing of The Poems of W.B. Yeats: A New Edition (1983). Finneran retains the division of the poems into "Lyrical" and "Narrative and Dramatic" which Yeats accepted for the 1933 Collected Poems.[1] In doing so he has been severely criticised by Warwick Gould and others who believe that the projected Macmillan "Edition de Luxe" represents Yeats's final intentions, and who therefore insist that a chronological ordering of the poems would be more in the spirit of what was intended, according to Harold Macmillan, to be a "memorial" edition.[2] The textual and evidential problems involved in this dispute are extremely complex, and because of the lack of clearly decisive evidence it is probable that the debate will continue for some time to come -- though it seems the weight

1. Finneran's editorial policy is outlined in his Editing Yeats's Poems, esp. ch. 2.
2. Warwick Gould, "The Editor Take Possession," rev. of The Poems of W.B. Yeats: A New Edition, TLS, 29 June 1984, pp. 731-33, See also the subsequent debate in the "Letters" column of the TLS, Aug. 3, pp. 868-69; Aug. 10, p. 893; Aug. 31, p. 969; and Sept. 21, p. 1055; as well as Jeffares's introduction to A New Commentary, pp. vi-x; and Michael J. Sidnell's "Unacceptable Hypotheses: the New Edition of Yeats's Poems and Its Making," Yeats Annual, No. 3, ed. Warwick Gould (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 225-43. Finneran has defended his position in "The Order of Yeats's Poems," IUR, 14 (1984), 165-76.

of evidence so far clearly supports Gould and Jeffares. But it does seem that an attention to the way in which Yeats saw his career as shaping in his final years can at least provide a useful context for this debate, and perhaps allow us to understand why these competing possibilities exist.

In criticizing Finneran, Gould argues that "Yeats jealously guarded the concept of his poems as a shaped and ordered oeuvre."[1] This is undoubtedly true. But it is also true that Yeats, as he approached the end of his life, tended, as I have argued, to avoid any "final form" -- indeed, Gould has himself shown that Yeats saw the Macmillan project as something that could be undertaken after his death. There are a number of late poems in which Yeats questions the possibility of a perfected oeuvre. In "The Municipal Gallery Revisited" we are told: "You that would judge me, do not judge alone / This book or that, come to this hallowed place / Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon . . ." (VE 603-04). This is a plea for the person to be considered; but it does at least reflect the artist's sense that his works are not to be identified with his self. In "What Then?" Yeats describes the course of his life as a search for perfection, but supplements that search with a qualifying question which again sets the poet apart from his works:

> "The work is done," grown old he thought,
> "According to my boyish plan;
> Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,
> Something to perfection brought";
> But louder sang that ghost, "What then?" (VE 577)

"Perfection" is incomplete here: there is always more experience, even after death, the corpus is always an open possibility. The poem also reflects, I suspect, Yeats's late doubts about his "boyish plan," and his occasional sense that his youth had been spent in the pursuit of dreams. The poems associated with that pursuit are, of course, the main part of

1. Gould, p. 732.

those "Narrative" poems which in 1933 he allowed to be separated out from his "Lyrical" poetry.

The opposition of "Narrative and Dramatic" and "Lyric" is also present, I suggested, in the late works in which Yeats wrote drama in order, he often said, to produce lyrics: the songs of the severed heads, and the "alterative songs" which he published under various titles. The same opposition can be seen in the plays themselves, as the Orphic powers of the stroller-poet encounter the perfection of the Queen. The denouement in each play can be seen as a poetic argument for the rhetorical tactics of late Yeats, a reckless and (putatively) self-destructive encounter with negativity, a willingness for the singing head to be struck from the body.

Taking all the above factors into consideration, I would suggest that the spirit of Yeats's late works is somewhat less attuned than many critics have implied to the "monumental" intentions that are attributed to him in discussions of his plans for a collected edition. His willingness to allow the separation of the "Lyrical" and the "Narrative and Dramatic" is, I would also argue, less simply motivated by commercial considerations than is often suggested. This observation does not of course "solve" any editorial problem; but it does allow us to say that in a sense Yeats anticipates the debate within his work, proving a model in the plays (and to some extent in the ordering of his volumes) for the decay of monumental intentions at the hands of the poet's inheritors.

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The bibliography which follows is limited in its scope to works referred to in the text or consulted extensively in its preparation. It is divided into three main categories. The first is primary sources, including poems, plays, essays, letters and autobiographical writings of the authors studied. The second is works of reference, including bibliographies, handbooks, concordances, surveys, and the standard biographical works. The third and largest category is secondary sources. These are divided into separate subsections: gerontology, literary theory and history, and a section for each of the authors studied.

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